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AN ENGLISH SQUIRE.

A Novel.

BY

C. R. COLERIDGE,

AUTHOR OF "LADY BETTY," "HANBURY MILLS," "HUGH CRICHTON'S ROMANCE," ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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AN ENGLISH SQUIRE.

PART III. (*continued*).

CHAPTER XXXIII.

CIVIS ROMANUS SUM.

"The mightiest of all peoples under Heaven!"

"I TELL you, you stupid, blundering blockheads, that he *is* my brother; and we *are* Englishmen, and we know nothing whatever of your Carlist brigands, or whoever they are! We are British subjects, and you had better let us go, or the British Government will know the reason why," thundered Jack Lester, in exceedingly bad Spanish, interspersed with English epithets, at the top of his voice.

"Gentlemen, it is true; our passports are

at Ronda; conduct us thither, if you will. We are travelling for pleasure only, and have no concern with any political matters at all," said Alvar, in far more courteous accents.

The scene was the mountain side, the time evening, and Alvar and Jack were just beginning their descent, when they were confronted by an official, and surrounded by a small troop of soldiers in the government uniform. They had been suddenly encountered and stopped, and desired to produce their passports, and, these not being forthcoming, their account of themselves was met with civil incredulity, and they were desired to consider themselves under arrest.

"But—but don't you see that you're making an utter fool of yourself," shouted Jack, in a fury. "I tell you this gentleman *is* my brother, and we are the sons of Mr. Lester, of Oakby Hall, Westmoreland, and have nothing to do with your confounded Carlists. I'll knock the first fellow down—"

"Hush, Jack! Keep your temper," whis-

pered Alvar, in English. "Señor, I am the grandson of Señor Don Guzman de la Rosa, of Seville, well known as a friend to the government, and this is my half-brother from England."

"One of the De la Rosas, señor, is exactly what we know you to be; but as for this extraordinary falsehood by which you call yourself an Englishman—and the brother of this gentleman—why, you make matters worse for yourselves for attempting it."

"Ask the guide," said Alvar.

"Ah, doubtless; the fellow was known as having been engaged in the late war. Come, señores, you may as well accompany me in silence."

"Will you send a message by the direct route to Ronda, asking for our passports, and informing our friends of our safety?" said Alvar.

No, informing their friends was the last thing wished for. In the morning they would see.

"Do not resist, Jack," said Alvar; "it is quite useless; we must come."

"Don't you *hear* he is talking English to me?" said Jack, as a last appeal, and, of course, a vain one.

"I am sure they haven't got a magistrate's warrant," said Jack, as his alpenstock was taken away from him, and, closely guarded, he was made to precede Alvar down the hill, in a state of offended dignity and incredulous indignation. He was very angry, but not at all frightened; it was incredible that any Spanish officials should hurt *him*. Indeed, as he cooled down a little, the adventure might have been a good joke, but for the certainty that Cherry would be imagining them at the bottom of a precipice.

After walking for some way along a different road from the one they had come by, they stopped at a little wayside tavern, where they were given to understand that they were to pass the night.

"But it's impossible; they *can't* keep us

here," cried Jack. "Isn't there a parish priest, or a magistrate, or a policeman, or some one to appeal to?"

"No one who could help us," answered Alvar. "I do not think there is anything to be afraid of for ourselves; we can easily prove that we are English when we get to some town; it is of Cherry that I think—he will be so frightened."

"You don't think they'll go and take him up?"

"Oh, no; I hope they will send to Ronda for our passports in the morning. But, Jack, do not fly in a passion. We must be very civil, and say we are quite willing to be detained in the service of the government."

"I'm hanged if I say anything of the sort," muttered Jack, whose prominent sensation was rage at the idea that he, an Englishman, a gentleman, a man with an address, and a card—though he had unluckily left it at home—should be subjected to such

an indignity, stopped in his proceedings by a dozen trumpery Spaniards!

Alvar was not so full of a sense of the liberty of the subject; he felt sure that he was mistaken for Manoel, and more than suspected that the government might have been justified in detaining his cousin. He did not, however, wish to confide this to Jack, of whose prudence he was doubtful, and knew that if the worst came to the worst, his grandfather could get them out of the scrape.

There might be no danger, but it was very uncomfortable, and provisions being scarce in the emergency, the captain—who looked much more like a bandit than an officer—gave his prisoners no supper but a bit of bread. Alvar was Spaniard enough to endure the fasting, but Jack, after his day of mountain climbing, was ready to eat his fingers off with hunger; and as the hours wore on, began really to feel sick, wretched, and low-spirited, and though he preserved an un-

moved demeanour, to wonder inwardly what his father would say if he knew where he was, and to remember that the Spaniards were a cruel people and invented the Inquisition! And then he wondered if Gipsy was thinking of him.

Moreover, it was very cold, and they were of course tired to begin with, so that, when at length the morning dawned, Alvar was startled to see how like Jack looked to Cheriton after a bad night, and made such representations to the captain that Englishmen could not bear cold and hunger, that he obtained a fair share of bread and a couple of onions—provisions which Jack enjoyed more than he would have done had he guessed what Alvar had said to procure them.

"I'm up to anything now," he said. "If they would only let us put a note in the post for Cherry, it would be rather a lark after all."

"I do not know where you will find a

post-office," said Alvar disconsolately, as they were marched off in an opposite direction to Ronda. "If Cherry only does not climb that mountain to look for us!"

"I should like to set this country to rights a little," said Jack.

"That," said Alvar dryly, "is what many have tried to do, but they have not succeeded."

The prisoners were very well guarded, and though Alvar made more than one attempt to converse with the captain, he got scarcely any answer. Still, from the exceedingly curious glances with which he regarded them, Alvar suspected that he was not quite clear in his own mind as to their identity. After a long day's march they struck down on a small Moorish-looking town, called Zahara, built beside a wide, quick-rushing river.

And now Alvar's hopes rose, as here resided an acquaintance of his grandfather, a noted breeder of bulls, who knew him well, and had once seen Cheriton at Seville. Besides, the

authorities of Zahara might be amenable to reason.

However, they could get no hearing that night, and were shut up in what Jack called the station-house, but which was really a round Moorish tower with horseshoe arches. Here Alvar obtained a piece of paper, and they concocted a full description of themselves, their travelling companions, and their destination, which Alvar signed with his full name,—

"ALVARO GUZMAN LESTER,

Of Westmoreland, England,"

and directed to El Señor Don Luis Pavieco, Zahara, and this he desired might be given to the local authorities. He also tried hard, but in vain, to get a note sent to Ronda.

They hoped that the early morning might produce Don Luis, but they saw nothing of any one but the soldier who brought them their food, which was still of the poorest.

Alvar's patience began to give way at last; he walked up and down the room.

"Oh, I am mad when I think of my brother!" he exclaimed. "My poor Cheriton. What he will suffer!"

"Don't you think they'll let us out soon?" said Jack, who had subsided into a sort of glum despair.

"Oh, they will wait—and delay—and linger. It drives me mad!" he repeated vehemently, and throwing himself into a seat he hid his face in his arms on the table.

"Well," said Jack, "it's dogged as does it. I wish I hadn't used up all my tobacco though."

Early the next morning their door was opened at an unusual hour, and they were summoned into a sort of hall, where they found "el Capitano," another officer in a respectable uniform, and, to Alvar's joy, Don Luis Pavieco himself.

The thing was ended with ludicrous ease. Don Luis bowed to Alvar, and turning to the

officer declared that Don Alvar Lester was perfectly well known to him, and that the other gentleman was certainly his half-brother and an Englishman. The officer bowed also, smiled, hoped that they had not been incommoded; it was a slight mistake.

"Mistake!" exclaimed Jack; "and pray, Alvar, what's the Spanish for apology—damages?"

Alvar turned a deaf ear, and bowed and smiled with equal politeness.

"He had been sure that in due time the slight mistake would be rectified. Were they now free to go?"

"Yes;" and Don Luis interposed, begging them to come and get some breakfast with him while their horses could be got ready. Their guide?—oh, he was still detained on suspicion.

"Well," ejaculated Jack, "they are the coolest hands. Incommoded! I should think we have been incommoded indeed!"

In the meantime no hint of how matters

had really gone reached the anxious hearts at Ronda. The authorities had scouted the idea of brigands, and had revealed the existence of a dangerous ravine, some short distance from the mountain path. Doubtless the darkness had overtaken them, and they had been lost. The guides declared that nothing was more unlikely, as it was hardly possible to reach the ravine from the path, the rocks were so steep. A search was however made by some of the most active, it need not be said, in vain. Cheriton, afterwards, never could bear a reference to those days and nights of suspense—suspense lasting long enough to change the hope of good tidings into the dread of evil tidings, till he feared rather than longed for the sounds for which his whole being seemed to watch.

Nothing could exceed Mr. Stanforth's kindness to him, and he held up at first bravely, and submitted to his friend's care. On the third morning they resolved that Don Guzman should be written to, and

Cherry, who had been wandering about in an access of restless misery, tried to begin the letter; but he put down the pen, turning faint and dizzy, and unable to frame a sentence.

"I cannot," he said faintly. "I cannot see."

"You must lie down, my dear boy; you have had no rest. I will do it."

"My father, too," Cheriton said, with a painful effort at self-control. "I think—there's no chance. I must try to do it; but —oh—Jack—Jack!"

He buried his face on his arms with a sob that seemed as if it would tear him to pieces.

"You must not write yet to your father," said Mr. Stanforth. "I do not give up hope. Courage, my boy!"

Suddenly a loud scream rang through the house, and an outburst of voices, and one raised joyously,—

"My brother—my brother—are you here?

—we are safe!" and as Cherry started to his feet Alvar, followed by Jack, rushed into the room, and clasped him in his arms.

"Safe! yes, the abominable, idiotic brutes of soldiers! But we're all right, Cherry. You mustn't mind now."

"Yes, we are here, and it is over."

"Thank Heaven for His great mercy!" cried Mr. Stanforth, almost bursting into tears as he grasped Alvar's hand.

"Bandits, bandits?" cried half-a-dozen voices.

But Cherry could not speak a word; he only put out his hand and caught Jack's, as if to feel sure of his presence also.

"*Mi querido*," said Alvar in his gentle, natural tones, "all the terror is over—now you can rest. I think you had better go, Jack. I will take care of him," he added.

"Yes," said Mr. Stanforth; "this has been far too much. Come, Jack—come and tell us all that has chanced."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

JACK ON HIS METTLE.

"Lat me alone in chesing of my wyf,
That charge upon my bak I wol endure."
CHAUCER.

THAT same morning, when Jack and Alvar had ridden hurriedly up to the hotel, looking eagerly to catch sight of those who were so anxiously watching for them, their eyes fell on Gipsy's solitary figure, standing motionless, with eyes turned towards the mountain, and hands dropped listlessly before her. Jack's heart gave a great bound, and at the sound of the horses' hoofs, she turned with a start and scream of joy, and sprang towards them, while Jack, jumping off, caught both her hands, crying,—

"Oh, don't be frightened any more, we're come!"

"Your brother!" exclaimed Gipsy, as she flew into the house; but her cry of "Papa! papa!" was suddenly choked with such an outburst of blinding, stifling tears and sobs, that she paused perforce; and as they ran upstairs, Mariquita, the pretty Spanish girl who waited on them, caught her hand and kissed her fervently.

"Ah, señorita, dear señorita; thanks to the saints, they have sent her lover back to her. Sweet señorita, now she will not cry!"

A sudden access of self-consciousness seized on Gipsy; she blushed to her finger-tips, and only anxious to hide the tears she could not check, she hurried away, round to the back of the inn, into a sort of orchard, where grew peach and nectarine trees, apples and pears already showing buds, and where the ground was covered with jonquils and crocuses, while beyond was the rocky preci-

pice, and, far off, the snowy peaks that still made Gipsy shudder. Unconscious of the strain she had been enduring, she was terrified at the violence of her own emotion, for Gipsy was not a girl who was given to gusts of feeling. Probably the air and the solitude were her best remedies, for she soon began to recover herself, and sat up among the jonquils. Oh, how thankful she was that the danger was over, and the bright, kindly Cheriton spared from such a terrible sorrow! But was it for Cheriton's sake that these last two days had been like a frightful dream, that her very existence seemed to have been staked on news of the lost ones? No one—*no one* could help such feelings. Miss Weston had cried about it, and her father had never been able to touch a pencil. But that foolish Mariquita! Here Gipsy sprang to her feet with a start, for close at her side stood Jack. At sight of him, strong and ruddy and safe, her feeling overpowered her consciousness of it, and she said, earnestly,—

"Oh, I am so thankful you are safe! It was so dreadful!"

"And it was not dreadful at all in reality, only tiresome and absurd," said Jack.

"It was very dreadful here," said Gipsy, in a low voice, with fresh tears springing.

"Oh, if you felt so!" cried Jack ardently; "I wish it could happen to me twenty times over!"

"Oh, never again!" she murmured; and then Jack, suddenly and impetuously,—

"But I *am* glad it happened, for I found out up in that dirty hole how I felt. There was never any one like you. I—I—could you ever get to think of me? Oh, Gipsy, I mean it. I love you!" cried the boy, his stern, thoughtful face radiant with eagerness, as he seized her hand.

"Oh, no—you don't!" stammered Gipsy, not knowing what she said.

"I do!" cried Jack desperately. "I never was a fellow that did not know his own mind. Of course I know I'm young

yet; but I only want to look forward. I shall work and get on, and—and up there at school and at Oakby I never thought there was any one like you. I disliked girls. But now—oh, Gipsy, won't you begin at the very beginning with me, and let us live our lives together?"

Boy as he was, there was a strength of intention in Jack's earnest tones that carried conviction. Perhaps the mutual attraction might have remained hidden for long, or even have passed away, but for the sudden and intense excitement that had brought it to the surface.

"Won't you—won't you?" reiterated Jack; and Gipsy said "Yes."

They stood in the glowing sunshine, and Jack felt a sort of ecstasy of unknown bliss. He did not know how long was the pause before Gipsy, starting, and as if finishing the sentence, went on,—

"Yes—but I don't know. What will they all say? Isn't it wrong when we are so young?"

"Wrong! as if a year or two made any difference to feelings like mine!" cried Jack. "If I were twenty-five, if I were thirty, I couldn't love you better!"

"Yes—but—" said Gipsy, in her quick, practical way. "You *are* young, and—and —papa— If he says—"

"Of course I shall tell him," said Jack. "I am not going to steal you. If you will wait, I'll work and show your father that I am a man. For I love you!"

"I'll wait!" said Gipsy softly; and then voices sounded near, and she started away from him, while Jack—but Jack could never recollect exactly what he did during the next ten minutes, till the thought of how he was to tell his story sobered him. Practical life had not hitherto occupied much of Jack's mind; he had had no distinct intentions beyond taking honours, and if possible a fellowship, till he had been seized upon by this sudden passion, which in most lads would probably have been a passing fancy,

but in so earnest and serious a nature took at once a real and practical shape. But when Jack thought of facing Mr. Stanforth, and still worse his own father, with his wishes and his hopes, a fearful embarrassment seized on him. No, he must first make his cause good with the only person who was likely to be listened to—he must find Cherry. However, the first person he met was Mr. Stanforth, who innocently asked him if he knew where his daughter was. Jack blushed and stared, answering incoherently,—

"I was only looking for Cherry."

"There he is. I heard him asking for you. Perhaps Gipsy is in the orchard."

Jack felt very foolish and cowardly, but for his very life he could not begin to speak, and he turned towards the bench where Cherry sat in the sun, smoking his pipe comfortably, and conscious of little but a sense of utter rest and relief.

"Well, Jack, I haven't heard your story yet," he said, as Jack came and sat down

beside him. "I don't think you have grown thin, though Alvar says they nearly starved you to death."

"Where is Alvar?" asked Jack.

"I got him to go to the mayor, *intendant*, whatever the official is called here, and see if anything could be done for poor Pedro. His mother was here just now in an agony. Jack, I think the 'evils of government' might receive some illustrations."

"Cheriton," said Jack, with unusual solemnity, "I've got to ask your advice—that is, your opinion—that is, to tell you something."

"Don't you think I should look at it from a ludicrous point of view?" said Cherry, whose spirits were ready for a reaction into nonsense.

"I don't know," said Jack; "but it is very serious. I have made up my mind, Cherry, that I mean to marry Miss Stanforth, and I shall direct all my efforts in life to accomplish this end. I know that I am younger than is

usual on these occasions; but such things are not a question of time. Cherry, *do* help me; they'll all listen to you."

Cheriton sat with his pipe in his hand, so utterly astonished, that he allowed Jack's sentences to come to a natural conclusion. Then he exclaimed,—

"Jack! You! Oh, impossible!"

"I don't see why you should think it impossible. Anyhow, it's true!"

"But it is so sudden. Jack, my dear boy, you're slightly carried off your head just now. Don't say a word about it—while we're all together at least; it wouldn't be fair."

"But I have," answered Jack, "and—and—" in a different tone, "Cherry, I don't know how to believe it myself, but she—it is too wonderful—she will."

Cherry did not answer. He put his hand on Jack's with a sudden, quick movement.

"I suppose you think I ought to have

waited till I had a better right to ask her," said Jack presently.

A look of acute pain passed over Cheriton's face. He said doubtfully, "Are you quite sure?"

"Sure? Sure of what?"

"Of your own mind and hers?"

"Did I ever not know my own mind? I'm not a fool!" said Jack angrily. "And, if you could have seen just the way she looked, Cherry, you wouldn't have any doubts."

"I am afraid," said Cherry very gently, and after a pause, "that you have been very hasty. I don't think that father, or Mr. Stanforth either, would listen to you now."

"I want you to ask them," said Jack insinuatingly. "Father would do anything for you now; and, besides, we are young enough to wait, and I've got the world before me, and I mean to keep straight and get on. Why should Mr. Stanforth object? I feel as if I could do anything. You don't think it

would make me idle? No, I shall work twice as hard as I should without it."

"Yes," said Cherry quietly; "no doubt."

Something in his tone brought recent facts to Jack's remembrance, as was proved by his sudden silence. Cherry looked round at him and smiled.

"You know, Jack, I wasn't prepared to find the schoolboy stage passed into the lover's. I'll speak to Mr. Stanforth, if that is what you want, and even if things don't fit in at once, if you feel as you say, you won't be much to be pitied with such an aim before you!"

"I'm not at all ashamed of telling my own story," said Jack, "but—"

"*But* there is Mr. Stanforth coming out of the house, so if you mean to run away you had better make haste about it."

Jack rose, but he paused a moment, and as Mr. Stanforth came towards them, said bluntly,—

"Mr. Stanforth, I want Cheriton to tell

you about it first;" then deliberately walked away.

Poor Mr. Stanforth, who had little expected such an ending to his tour with his favourite little daughter, was feeling himself in a worse scrape than the lovers, and though he had romance enough to sympathize with them, was disposed to be angry with Jack for his inconsiderate haste, and to feel that "What will your mother say?" was a more uncomfortable question to himself than to his daughter.

Cheriton, on his side, would have been very glad of a few minutes for reflection, but Mr. Stanforth began at once,—

"I see I have not brought news to you."

"No," said Cherry. "Jack has been talking to me; I had no idea of such a thing. But, Mr. Stanforth, there is no doubt that Jack is thoroughly in earnest," as a half smile twinkled on the artist's perplexed countenance.

"In earnest, yes; but what business has

he to be in earnest? What would your father say to such a proceeding? What can he say at your brother's age, and of people of whom he knows nothing, and of a connexion of which, knowing nothing, he probably would not approve?"

Cheriton blushed, knowing that this last assertion contained much truth.

"But he does know," he said, "of all your kindness, and he will know more—and —and when he knows you, he could not think—"

"Excuse me, my dear fellow, but he will think. He will think I have thrown my daughter in the way of his sons—for which I have only my own imprudence, I suppose, to thank. And he would no doubt dislike a connexion the advantages of which, whatever they may be, are not enumerated in Burke's 'Landed Gentry.'"

Mr. Stanforth smiled, though he spoke with a certain spirited dignity, and Cheriton could not contradict him; for though Mr.

Stanforth had not risen out of any romantic obscurity, he certainly owed his present position to his own genius and high personal character. He had himself married well, and all would depend on the way in which it was put to a man like Mr. Lester, slow to realize unfamiliar facts. Cheriton could not take the liberty of saying that he thought such an objection would be groundless, or at least easily overcome; but he was afraid that his silence might be misconstrued, and said,—

"But on your side, Mr. Stanforth, would you think it wrong to give Jack a little hope? I think he has every prospect of success in life. And he is a very good fellow. Sudden as this is, I feel sure that he will stick to it."

"As to that," said Mr. Stanforth, "I like Jack very well, and for my part I think young people are all the better for having to fight their way; but whatever may take place in the future I can allow no intercourse till your father's consent is obtained. That will give a chance of testing their feelings on

both sides. Gipsy is a mere child, she may not understand herself."

"I think," said Cheriton, "that if Jack writes to my father now, or speaks to him when he gets home, that no one will attend to him. But if it could wait till we all go back, I could explain the circumstances so much better. It is always difficult to take in what passes at a distance."

"Well," said Mr. Stanforth, "all I have to say is that when Jack applies to me, with his father's consent, I will hear what he has to say, not before. Come, Cheriton," he added, "you know there is no other way of acting. This foolish boy has broken up our pleasant party, and upset all our plans."

"Perhaps I ought to have made more apologies for him," said Cherry, with a smile. "But I want things to go well with Jack. It would be so bad for him to have a disappointment of that kind just as he is making his start in life."

Mr. Stanforth noticed the unconscious

emphasis, "I want things to go well with *Jack*," and said kindly, "Jack couldn't have a better special pleader, and if he has as much stuff in him as I think, a few obstacles won't hurt him."

"Oh, Jack has plenty of good strong stuff in him, mental, moral—and physical, too," added Cherry hurriedly.

Mr. Stanforth was touched by the allusion, which was evidently intended to combat a possible latent objection on his part.

"Jack is excellent—but inconvenient," he said, thinking it better not to make the subject too serious. "The thing is what to do next." As he spoke, Jack himself came up to them, and Mr. Stanforth prevented his first words with, "My dear fellow, I have said my say to your brother, and I don't mean to listen to yours just yet."

"I believe, sir," said Jack, "that I—I have not observed sufficient formalities. I shall go straight home to my father, and I hope to obtain his full consent. But it is

due to me to let me say that my mind is, and always will be, quite unalterable. And I'm not sorry I spoke, sir—I can't be!"

"No," said Mr. Stanforth; "but I must desire that you make no further attempt at present."

"I hope, Mr. Stanforth, that you don't imagine I would attempt anything underhand!" cried Jack impetuously.

"I shall have every confidence in you," said Mr. Stanforth gravely; "but remember, I cannot regard you as pledged to my daughter by anything that has passed to-day."

Jack made no answer, but he closed his lips with an expression of determination.

When Alvar came back, having succeeded in instituting an inquiry into the merits of Pedro's character, there was a discussion of plans, which ended in the three brothers agreeing to go by the shortest route to Seville, whence Jack could at once start for England; while the Stanforths followed them by a longer and more picturesque road, and

after picking up their own property, would also go home *viâ* Madrid some week or two later. Alvar was not nearly so much astonished as the others, nor so much concerned.

"It was natural," he said, "since Jack's heart was not preoccupied, and would doubtless pass away with absence."

Jack was so excessively indignant that he did not condescend to a reply, only asking Cherry if he was too tired to start at once.

This proposal, however, was negatived by Mr. Stanforth, who remarked that he did not want to hear of any more adventures in the dusk; and it was agreed that both parties should start early on the following morning. In the meantime the only rational thing was to behave as usual. Jack was, however, speechless and surly with embarrassment, and stuck to Cheriton as if he was afraid to lose sight of him; while Gipsy bore herself with a transparent affectation of unconsciousness, and, though she blushed at every look,

coined little remarks at intervals. Miss Weston kindly professed to be seized with a desire to inspect the Dominican Convent, and carried her and Alvar off for that purpose; while Jack held by Cherry, who was glad to rest, though this startling incident had one good effect, in driving away all the haunting memories of the late alarm.

The next morning all were up with the sun, Gipsy busily dispensing the chocolate and pressing it on Cheriton as he sat at the table. Suddenly she turned, and, with a very pretty gesture, half confident, half shy, she held up a cup to Jack, who stood behind.

"Won't you have some?" she said, with a hint of her own mischief in her eyes and voice. Jack seized the cup, and—upset it over the deft, quick hands that tendered it to him.

"Oh, I have burnt you!" he exclaimed, in so tragic a voice that all present burst out laughing.

"No," said Gipsy, "early morning chocolate

is not dangerously hot; but you have spoiled my cuffs, and spilled it, and I don't think there's any more of it."

"Jack's first attention!" said Cherry, under his breath; but he jumped up and followed Alvar, who had gone to see about the mount provided for them. Miss Weston was tying various little bags on to her saddle.

"I say, Mr. Stanforth," called Cherry, "there's such a picturesque mule here; do come and see it."

He looked up with eyes full of mischievous entreaty as Mr. Stanforth obeyed his call. "Well," said the latter with a smile, "I may ask *you* to come and see me at Kensington, for I must get the picture finished."

"That was a much prettier picture, just now," said Cheriton; "and I'm sure Jack would be happy to sit for it *any* time."

When Gipsy, long afterwards, was pressed on the subject of that little parting interview, she declared that Jack had done nothing but say that he wouldn't make love to her on any

account; but however that might be, she soon came running out, rosy and bashful; while Cheriton put her on her mule and gave her a friendly hand-squeeze and a look of all possible encouragement. Mr. Stanforth went into the house and called Jack to bid him a kind farewell. After the party had set off, Gipsy looked back and saw the crowd of mule drivers and peasants, the host and hostess, with Mariquita kissing her hands, and the three brothers standing together in the morning sunshine, waving their farewells. As they passed out of sight, her father touched her hand and made her ride up close to his side.

"My little girl," he said, "this is a serious thing that has come to you; I do not know how it may end for you. I am sure that it will bring you anxiety and delay. Be honest with yourself, and do not exaggerate the romance and excitement of these last few days into a feeling which may demand from you much sacrifice."

Gipsy had never heard her father speak in this tone before—she was awed and silenced.

"Be honest," repeated her father, "for I think it is a very honest heart that you have won."

"Papa," said Gipsy, "I *am* honest, and I think I know what you mean. But I don't mind waiting if I know he is waiting too. He said 'begin at the beginning' with him."

"Well," said Mr. Stanforth with a sigh, "*Ché sará sará;*" but with a sudden turn, "*He* is young, too, you know, and many things may happen to change his views."

"I cannot help it now, papa," said Gipsy, who felt that those days and nights of terror had developed her feelings more than weeks of common life. She gave her father's hand a little squeeze, and looked up in his face with the tears on her black eyelashes. She *meant* to say, "I love *you* all the better because of this new love which has made everything deeper and warmer for me," but all she managed to say was—"There!

There are all the things tumbling out of your knapsack! I'm not going to have *that* happen again even if—if—whatever should take place in the future."

"I hope, my dear, that nothing more will happen, at least till we are at home again," said Mr. Stanforth meekly; but Gipsy put the things into the knapsack, and after a little silence they fell into a conversation on the scenery as naturally as possible.

CHAPTER XXXV.

A SUMMONS.

"Once from high Heaven
Is a father given.
Once—and, oh, never again!"

AFTER Jack returned home, with the understanding that the disclosure of his holiday occupation should await his brother's return, and after the Stanforths had also left Seville, Alvar and Cheriton spent several weeks there without any adventures to disturb their tranquillity. Alvar was a good deal with his grandfather, whose health was not at this time good, but who had evinced great curiosity as to the details of their detention on the mountains. He used also to go to

the different clubs and meet acquaintances, where they talked politics and scandal, and played at cards, dominoes, and billiards. It was an aimless existence, and Cheriton sometimes fancied that Alvar grew restless under it, and would not be sorry to return to England. This, however, might have been owing to Cheriton's own decided dislike to the young *Sevillanos*, who struck him as almost justifying his grandmother's preconceived theory of Alvar's probable behaviour.

"Ah, they do not suit you, that is not what you like," Alvar said cheerfully; but he never said, "It is not *good*, this sort of life does not make a nation great or virtuous."

Manoel was of another type, and perhaps a more respectable one; but they saw very little of him. Cheriton liked the ladies, who were kind, and possessed many domestic virtues; and at Don Guzman's country place there was something exceedingly pleasant in the cheerfulness and gaiety of

the peasants. He would have liked to have found out something of the working of the Church, of the views of the clergy, and how far they differed, not only from those of an Anglican, but of an intelligent Roman priest in more civilized countries, but on these subjects no one would talk to him. He heard mutterings of hatred towards the priests in some quarters, and a good deal of chatter about processions and ceremonies from the young ladies, but nothing further. He did not want for occupation. He could now read and speak Spanish easily; and although the Cid, Ferdinand and Isabella, the Armada, and the Inquisition had been about the only salient points in his mind previously, he made a study of Spanish history, without much increase of his admiration for the Spaniards. He was able, also, to do much more sight-seeing than at first, and of the cathedral he never tired, and never came to the end of its innumerable chapels, each with some great picture, which

Mr. Stanforth had taught him how to see; never ceased to find something new in the mystery and solemnity of its aisles with their glory of coloured lights.

These quiet weeks formed a sort of resting-place, during which he was able to think both of the past and of the future; he could dare now to look away from the immediate present. Cheriton's eyes were very clear, his moral sense very keen, and he saw that he had been under a delusion, that Ruth and he were as the poles asunder, that her deliberate deception, her want of any sense of honour, had marked a nature that never could have satisfied his. Love in his case was no longer blind, but it was none the less passionate, and, whatever else life might hold for him, the memory of all his first, best hopes could never bring him anything but pain. This pain had been as much as he could bear, but others, he thought, had suffered as keenly, and had led lives that were neither ignoble nor unhappy. Because

one great love had gone out of his life was nothing else worthy or dear? "Nothing" had been the answer of his first anguish, but Cheriton's nature was too rich in love for such an answer to stand. The help for which he had prayed had been sent to him, and it came in the sense that home faces were still dear—*how* dear his late alarm had taught him—home duties still paramount, that he could be a good son and brother and friend still. And he thought with a sort of surprise of the many pleasant and not unhappy hours he had passed of late; how much, after all, he had "enjoyed himself." He hardly knew that his quick intelligence was a gift to be thankful for, or that his unselfish interest in others brought its own reward. On another side of his nature, also, he resisted the aimlessness of his lost hopes. The thought of Ruth had sweetened his success at Oxford, but he would not be such a coward as to give up all his objects in life, he would make a name for himself still, and

show her that she had not brought him to utter shipwreck. This motive was strong in Cheriton, though it ran alongside with much higher ones.

One picture in the cathedral exercised a great fascination over Cheriton's mind. It hangs in the Capella del Consuelo, over a side altar, dedicated to the *Angel de la Guarda*, and is one of the many masterpieces of Murillo to be found in Seville. It represents a tall, strong angel with wide-spread wings, and grave, benevolent face, leading by the hand a child—a subject which has been of course repeated in every form of common-place prettiness. But in this picture the figure of the angel conveys a sense of heavenly might and unearthly guardianship which no imitation or repetition could give. It is called the "Guardian Angel;" but Cheriton had been told by one of the priests that the name given to it by the painter himself was "The Soul and the Church," which for some reason or other had been

changed by the monks of the Capuchin Convent, to whom the picture had originally belonged. It was a thought and a carrying out of the thought which, seen among such surroundings, was full of suggestion, how and why that Divine Guidance seemed here in great measure to have gone astray, how the great angel's finger had not always pointed upward, and yet how utterly helpless and rudderless the nation was when it cast off the Guide of its fathers. Then his thoughts turned to his own life and to the Hand that held it, to the Guidance that was sometimes so hard to recognize, so difficult to yield to, and yet how the sense of a love and a wisdom above his own, speaking to him, whether in the events of his own life, the better impulses of his own heart, or in the visible forms of religion, was the one light in the darkness.

"O'er moor and fen, o'er crag and torrent, till
The night is gone."

As he murmured the words half aloud a

hand touched his shoulder. He looked up and saw Alvar standing beside him.

"*Mi querido*, I have been looking for you. Will you come home? I want you," he said.

"There is something the matter," said Cheriton quickly, as he looked at him. "What is it?"

"Ah, I *must* tell you!" said Alvar reluctantly. "It is bad news, indeed. Sit down again—here—I have received this." He took a telegraph paper out of his pocket and put it into Cherry's hand.

"MRS. LESTER TO ALVAR LESTER.

"Your father has met with a dangerous accident. He wishes to see you. Come home at once. He desires Cheriton to run no risk."

Cheriton looked up blankly for a moment, then started to his feet, crushing up the paper in his hand.

"Quick," he said, "we must go at once. When? By Madrid is the shortest way."

"Yes—I—" said Alvar; "but see what he says."

"I *must* go," said Cheriton. "Don't waste any words about it. I *know* he wants me. I'll be careful enough, only make haste."

But he paused, and dropping on his knees on the altar step, covered his face with his hands, rose, and silently led the way out of the cathedral.

Alvar, with his usual tact, perceived at once that it would be impossible to persuade him to stay behind, and did not fret him by the attempt, though this hasty journey and the return to Oakby in the first sharp winds of March were more on his own mind than the thought of what news might meet them at the journey's end.

It was still early in the day, and they were able to start within a few hours, only taking a few of their things with them, amid

a confusion of tears, sympathy, and regret; Don Guzman evidently parting from Alvar with reluctance, and bestowing a tremendous embrace on Cheriton in return for his thanks for the kindness that had been shown to him. Manoel, on the other hand, was evidently relieved at their early departure.

Some days later, on a wild, blustering morning in the first week of March, Jack Lester stood on the step of the front door of Oakby. The trees were still bare, and scarcely a primrose peeped through the dead leaves beneath them; pale rays of sun were struggling with the quick driven clouds, the noisy caw of the rooks mingled with the rustle of the leafless branches. Jack was pale and heavy-eyed. He looked across the wide, wild landscape as if its very familiarity were strange to him, then started, as up the park from a side entrance came a carriage and pair as fast as it could be driven, and in another minute pulled up at the door.

"Oh, Cherry, we have never dared to

wish for you!" cried Jack, as Cheriton sprang out and caught both his hands. "Come in—come in! Oh, if you had *but* come last night!"

"Not too late—not too late altogether?"

Jack shook his head, his voice choked, but they knew too well what he would tell them, and the two brothers stood just within the door, holding by each other, Jack sobbing with relief from the strain of responsibility and loneliness, and Cheriton dazed and silent, unable to utter a word.

The servants began to gather round them.

"Oh, Mr. Cheriton, it's some comfort to see you back, sir!" said the butler; and—"Thank heaven, sir, you're come to help your poor grandmother!" cried the old housekeeper; while Nettie, flying downstairs, threw herself into Cheriton's arms, as if they were a refuge from the agony of new and most forlorn sorrow, while he held her fast with long speechless kisses.

Alvar stood still. In that instinctive

mutual clinging in the first shock of their common grief he had no share, and for the moment he stood as much a stranger among them as when, more than a year before, he had come into the midst of their Christmas merry-making, and had silenced their laughter by his unwelcome presence.

Jack was the first to awaken to a sense of present necessity.

"You have been travelling all night," he said. "Come and sit down—you must be tired out."

"We had some breakfast at Hazelby, while we waited for the carriage," said Alvar; and Cherry, as Nettie released her hold, unfastened his wraps, and moved over to the hall fire, sitting down in the great chair, as they began to exchange question and answer.

"What happened—how was it?"

"Didn't you get my telegram?" said Jack.

"No; only granny's. Where is she?"

"Asleep, I hope. The meet was at Ashrigg, and old Rob fell in taking the brook, just by Fletcher's farm. And so—so he was thrown, and it was an injury to the spine; but he was quite conscious, and sent that telegram to Alvar. After that he didn't often know us—till—till last night. And it was over before eleven. We did not think you could possibly get here till to-night, and we had no news of you, so I telegraphed again as soon as I got home; but I suppose you missed the message."

"We wrote and telegraphed from Madrid," said Alvar; "it is quite possible that there should be delay there; and in Paris and London we had hardly a moment to catch the trains. Cherry has been too anxious to feel the fatigue, but he *must* rest now."

"There must be a great many things to attend to," said Cheriton, standing up, and passing his hand over his eyes as if he were rousing himself out of an unnatural dream.

"Not yet," said Jack, "it is so early. Mr. Ellesmere will come back by-and-by."

Cherry looked round. He noticed that a pair of antlers had been removed from one of the panels, and an impulse came to him to ask why, and then the oddest sense of the incongruity of the remark. He rather knew than felt the truth of the blow that had fallen on them, and all the different aspects of this great change, even to remote particulars, passed over his mind, as over the mind of a drowning man, but as thoughts, not as realities. Suddenly there was a bark and a scutter, and Buffer, in an ecstasy of incongruous joy, rushed into the hall, jumped upon him, yelping, licking, dancing, and writhing with rapture. He was followed by Rolla, who came slowly in, and laid his great tawny head on his master's knee, looking sorrowfully up in his face as much as to say that *he* knew well enough that this was like no other home-coming.

Cheriton started up and pushed them all aside. He walked away to the window and stared out at the park, into the library and looked round it, evidently hardly knowing what he was about. Alvar, who had been standing pale and silent, roused himself too, and followed him, putting his arm over his shoulder.

"Come," he said; "come upstairs. Jack, where is there a fire?"

Cheriton yielded instinctively to Alvar's hand and voice, and Jack led them upstairs, saying that granny had insisted on their rooms being kept ready for them. Nettie withheld Buffer from following them, and crouched down on the rug by the hall fire till Jack returned to her.

"They have both gone to bed for a little while," he said; "even Alvar is tired out. Nettie, you had better go to granny, as soon as she is awake, and tell her that they are here, and that Cherry is pretty well."

"I suppose Cherry will tell us what to do," said Nettie, as she stood up.

Discipline and absence from home had improved Nettie; she was less childish and more considerate, remembering to tell Jack that he had had no breakfast, and to order some to be ready when the travellers should want it.

Bob, who had been sent for a day or two before, now joined them. He had grown as tall as Jack, but grief and awe gave him a heavy, sullen look, and indeed they said very little to each other. Jack wrote a few necessary letters, and sent them off by one of the grooms, and telegraphed to Judge Cheriton, who was coming that same evening, the news of what he would find. But their father had been so completely manager and master, that Jack felt as if giving an order himself were unjustifiable, and as soon as he dared, he went to see if Cherry were able to talk to him.

"Come, Jack," said Cherry, as the boy

came up to him; "come now, and tell me everything."

Jack leaned against the foot of the bed, and in the half-darkened room told all the details of the last few days. There had not been much suffering, nor long intervals of consciousness, so far as they knew. Cherry could have done no good till last night. Granny had done all the nursing. "I never thought," said Jack, "she loved any one so much." Mr. Ellesmere had been everything to them, and had written letters and told them what to do. "But last night father came more to himself, and sent for Mr. Ellesmere, and presently he fetched me, and father took hold of my hand, and said to me quite clearly, 'Remember, your eldest brother will stand in my place; let there be no divisions among you.' And then—then he told me to try and keep Bob straight, and that I had been a good lad. But oh, Cherry, if he had but known about Gipsy! But I couldn't say one word then. And then Mr.

Ellesmere said, 'Shall Jack say anything to Cherry for you?' And he smiled, and said, 'My love and blessing, for he has been the light of my eyes.' And then he sent for Bob and Nettie, and sent messages to old Wilson and some of the servants. And he said that he had tried to do his duty in life by his children and neighbours, but that he had often failed, especially in one respect, and also he had not ruled his temper as a Christian man should; and he asked every one to forgive him, and specially the vicar, if he had overstepped the bounds his position gave him; Mr. Ellesmere said something of 'thanks for years of kindness.' And then—we had the communion. And after a bit he said very low, 'If my boy should live, I know he will keep things together.' Then I think he murmured something about—about your coming—and the cold weather—and—and—you were not to fret—it was only waiting a little longer. And then quite quite loud he said, 'Fear God, and keep His

commandments,' and then just whispered, 'Fanny.' That was the last word; but he lived till eleven. And poor granny, she broke down into dreadful crying, and said, 'The light of *my* eyes—the light of *my* eyes is darkened.' Nettie was very good with her; but at last we all got to bed—and—oh, Cherry, it isn't quite so bad now we have you!" and Jack pressed up to his side.

Cheriton had listened to all this long, faltering tale leaning on his elbow, his wide open eyes fixed on his brother, without interrupting him by a word. Jack cried, and he put his arm round his neck, and said, "Poor boy!" but no tears came to him.

"I never thought—" said Jack, whose natural reserve was dispelled by stress of feeling, "I never thought what a good man he was, and how much he cared."

"Yes, he loved goodness," said Cherry, with a heavy sigh.

It was true. With some prejudices and many weaknesses, Gerald Lester had set his

duty first; he had lived such a life that those around him were the better for his existence, he had left a place empty and a work to be done. Who would fill the place—how would the work be done?

Through all the crush of personal grief, his two sons could not but ask themselves this question; but they could not bring themselves to speak of it to each other; and after a few minutes Cheriton said, "I think I will get up now. We must talk things over together; and I want to see granny."

"If you have rested."

"Oh, yes, as much as is possible. I am quite well, indeed. Go down, my boy. I will come directly."

Jack went with a lightened heart. If Cherry were well and able to take the lead among them, everything could be borne. When Cheriton came into the library he found that Alvar had already appeared, and was eating some breakfast, for it was still only twelve o'clock, while Mr. Ellesmere was

standing by the fire. The vicar greeted him kindly and quietly, and Alvar poured out some coffee for him; and then Mr. Ellesmere began to explain some of the arrangements he had been obliged to make, and that he had sent to their father's solicitor, Mr. Malcolm, to come in the afternoon. Cheriton thanked him, and asked a few questions; but Alvar did not seem to take the conversation to himself, till the butler, having taken away the breakfast things, paused, and after looking first at Cheriton, turned to Alvar, and said rather awkwardly,—

"Do you expect the judge by the five o'clock train, sir, and shall the carriage be sent to Hazelby to meet him?"

There was a moment's silence, the three younger brothers coloured to their very hair roots, and Cheriton made a half step away from Alvar's side. The sudden pang that shot through him by its very sharpness brought its own remedy. He put his hand on Alvar's arm as if to call his attention.

"The train comes in at five—we had better send, hadn't we?" he said.

"Oh, yes!" said Alvar.

He had grown a little pale, and he turned his large black eyes on Cheriton with a look half-proud, half-appealing, and so sad as to drown all Cheriton's momentary shrinking in self-reproach.

"Alvar," said Mr. Ellesmere, "if you will come with me, I have a message for you from your father."

He led the way into Mr. Lester's study, and Alvar followed him to the room, of which his last vivid recollection was of the painful dispute after the breach of his engagement. He stood by the fire in silence, and the vicar said,—

"Alvar, your father desired me to tell you that, of all the actions of his life he most regretted the neglect which for so many years he showed you. He bid me say that on his death-bed he desired his son's forgiveness."

"My father made me every amends in his power," said Alvar, in a low voice.

"He commended your grandmother and your sister to your protection and kindness; your brothers also, and thought thankfully of all that you and Cherry have become to each other."

Alvar was much agitated, for some moments he was unable to speak, then he said vehemently,—

"This is my inheritance, as it was my father's; but to my brothers I seem an interloper. This is the wrong my father did to me, he made me a stranger in my own place."

"It was a wrong of which he deeply repented."

"It does not become me to speak of it," said Alvar proudly.

"You must not exaggerate," said Mr. Ellesmere. "It would be hard for Cheriton to see any one in his father's place; but you have won from him, at any rate, a brother's love."

"I am his dear friend," said Alvar; "but it is different with Jack."

"Don't draw these fine distinctions. *Be* a worthy successor to your father; live here among your people, as he did, in the fear of God, and doing your duty as an English gentleman, and be, as you have ever been, patient and kind to your brothers. Doubtless it seems a hard task to you, but I earnestly believe that by God's blessing you may be all to them that even Cheriton might be in your place. Nay, the very differences between you may be,—nay have been the means of good."

"You are very kind to me, sir, and I thank you," said Alvar courteously; but Mr. Ellesmere felt as if his words had fallen a little flat. He felt sorry for Alvar, but he could not look forward to the future without uneasiness. He saw that the wrong was neither forgotten nor forgiven, and that there was in the young Spaniard's nature a background of immovable pride that promised ill for accommodating himself to unfamiliar

duties, and a want of moral insight that would be slow in recognizing them.

It seemed rather inconsistent when Alvar said meekly, "Cheriton will tell me in all things what I should do," and led the way back to the library.

Here they found the others gathered in a group by the fire; Nettie sitting on a stool at Cheriton's feet, Jack leaning over the back of his chair, and Bob close at hand. How much alike they looked, with their similar colouring and outline, and faces set in the same sorrowful stillness and softened by the same feelings! Alvar paused and looked at them for a moment, but Cheriton, seeing him, rose and came forward.

"We have been waiting for you, Alvar," he said. "I have been to see grandmamma, but I did not stay—she could not bear it; but now—will you come upstairs with us?"

He gave a look of invitation to Mr. Ellesmere also, and he followed them silently into the chamber of death.

There lay their father, all the irritable marks of human frailty smoothed away, and the grand outline and long beard giving him a likeness to some kingly monument. The twins held by each other, their grief almost overpowered by shrinking awe. Jack frowned and set his mouth hard, and wrung Cherry's hand in his stress of feeling till he almost crushed it, while Cheriton stood quite still and calm by Alvar's side.

"Let us pray," said Mr. Ellesmere; and as they all knelt down he repeated the Lord's Prayer, and such other words as came to him.

When they rose up again Cheriton bent down and kissed his father's brow, and one by one the younger ones followed his example. Only Alvar stood still, till Cheriton turned to him, and taking his hand, with a look that Mr. Ellesmere never forgot, drew him forward.

Alvar obeyed him, but as his lips touched his father's face the thought suddenly struck

Cheriton that it must have been for the first time—that never, even in babyhood, had a caress passed between the father and son; and then, in contrast, he thought of himself, and the grief, hitherto unrealized, broke forth at last. He hid his face in his hands, and hurried out of the room into his own, away from them all.

PART IV.

THE SQUIRE OF OAKBY.

"A lord of fat prize oxen and of sheep,
A raiser of huge melons and of pines,
A patron of some thirty charities,
A quarter-sessions chairman."

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE FUNERAL.

"Wild March wind, wilt thou never cease thy sighing?"

It was on a wild March morning, when sudden gleams of radiant sunlight contended with heavy storm-clouds, that Mr. Lester of Oakby was buried. There was no rain, but the violent wind carried the sound of the knell in fitful gusts over the mourning village, through the well-cared-for fields and plantations of Oakby, away to Ashrigg and Elderthwaite, bringing all the countryside in a great concourse to the funeral. For it was a real mourning, a real loss. Long years ago, Fanny Lester, with her bright smile, and clear, upward-looking eyes, had said to her

husband, "We have a piece of work in the world given to us, Gerald; let us try and do it." And under her strong influence the dutiful and honourable traditions of conduct to which Gerald Lester was born, widened and were drawn higher; the various offices he held were exercised with conscientious effort for the benefit of his neighbours; and his tenantry, mind, soul and body, were the better for his life among them. They could trust him, and if he sometimes made mistakes from which the wise Fanny might have saved him, her death had consecrated for him every simple duty that she had pointed out. Now, while "the old Squire" still meant his father, while he was still in the strength of his manhood, he was gone; and at the head of his grave there stood, not the son they knew, with his father's fair face and his mother's fair soul, but the dark, stately stranger, who — among all those north country gentlemen, farmers, and labourers who crowded round, those "neighbours" all

so well known to each other—looked so strangely out of place.

So thought another stranger who, when he had travelled northwards, had little thought to find himself present at such a scene.

The Stanforths had long since returned to London, and Gipsy found herself once more in the midst of as pleasant a home-circle as ever a girl grew up in, while her attention was claimed by numerous interests, social, intellectual, and domestic. Her mother shook her head over the story of Jack's proposal; but she said very little about the matter, secretly hoping that Gipsy would cease to think of it on returning to another atmosphere. All the advances, she said to her husband, must now come from the other side, and she could not but regard the future as doubtful, and was slightly incredulous of the charms of the travelling companions whom she had not herself seen. But Jack, while he was at Oxford, wrote to Mr.

Stanforth, about once a fortnight, rather formal and sententious epistles, which did not contain one word about Gipsy, but which in their regularity and simplicity impressed her mother favourably. One long, pleasant letter arrived from Cheriton during his last weeks at Seville, and of this Gipsy enjoyed the perusal. She did not show any symptoms of low spirits, and being a girl of some resolution of character, held her tongue and bided her time. Perhaps a bright and fairly certain expectation was all she as yet wanted or was ready for. She was young in feeling, even for her eighteen years, and in truth they were "beginning at the beginning."

Still she wished ardently that her father should accede to a request from Sir John Hubbard, that he should come down to Ashrigg Hall, and paint a companion picture of his wife to the one that he had taken of himself long ago. Lady Hubbard was infirm and could not come to London, or Sir John

would not have made such a demand on Mr. Stanforth's time, now, of course, even more fully occupied than it had been ten years before.

Mr. Stanforth hesitated; he did not like the notion of any possible meeting with Mr. Lester, while Jack's views remained a secret from him; but Sir John had shown him a good deal of kindness, and he felt curious to hear something of his young friends in their own neighbourhood. So the first week in March found him at Ashrigg, in the midst of a large family party, for the eldest son and his wife were staying there, and there were several daughters at home.

"We had hoped to give a few of our friends the pleasure of meeting you, Mr. Stanforth," said Sir John, after dinner, when the wine was on the table, "but our neighbourhood has sustained a great loss in the death of a valued friend of ours, Mr. Lester, of Oakby."

"Mr. Lester of Oakby! You don't say so! Surely that is very sudden," said Mr. Stanforth, infinitely shocked. "I saw a great deal of his sons in the south of Spain," he added in explanation.

"Indeed! They are at home now, poor fellows. They were just too late. I had this note from Jack—that's the second son—no, the third—this afternoon."

"I know Jack, too," said Mr. Stanforth, as he took the note. It was a very brief one, merely announcing his father's death, and adding,—

"My brothers returned from Spain this morning. We hope that the journey has done Cheriton no harm."

"Ah, poor Cheriton!" said Mr. Stanforth. "I fear he must have run a great risk. It will be a terrible blow to him. We formed something more than a travelling acquaintance."

"Poor Mr. Lester was here only a fortnight ago, speaking with delight of

Cheriton's entire recovery," said Lady Hubbard.

"Yes, he was much better," said Mr. Stanforth, a little doubtfully, "and full of enjoyment. But this will be indeed a startling change."

"Yes," said Sir John; "one does not know how to think of Alvar in his father's shoes. It was a sadly mismanaged business altogether."

"There is a great deal to like in Alvar Lester," said Mr. Stanforth; "but of course the circumstances are very peculiar."

"Yes. You see while the elder brother, Robert, was alive, no one thought much of Gerald, and when this Spanish marriage came out, it was a great shock. And he was too ready to listen to all the excuses about the boy's health. If he had come home and been sent to school in England he might have grown up like the rest, and black eyes instead of blue ones would have been all the difference."

"I have always thought his long absence inexplicable."

"Well, Lester hated the thought of his boyish marriage, and these other boys came, and Cherry was his darling. His wife did make an effort once, and Alvar was brought to France when he was about seven years old; but they said he was ill, and took him back again. Then when old Mrs. Lester came into power she opposed his coming, and things slipped on. I don't think he was expected to live at first, and, poor fellow! no one wished that he should."

"The second Mrs. Lester must have been a very remarkable person," said Mr. Stanforth.

"She was," said Lady Hubbard warmly. "She was a person to raise the tone of a whole neighbourhoood. She made another man of her husband, and he worshipped her. She was no beauty, and very small, but with the brightest of smiles, and eyes that seemed to look straight up into heaven. No one

could forget Fanny Lester. She influenced every one."

There was much more talk, and many side lights were cast on Mr. Stanforth's mind when he heard of Alvar's broken engagement to Virginia Seyton, and of her pretty cousin Ruth's recent marriage to Captain Lester, "though at one time every one thought that there was something between her and Cheriton." He could not but think most of how his own daughter's future might be affected by this sudden freeing of her young lover from parental control; but he was full of sympathy for them all, and the note that he wrote to Cheriton was answered by a request that he would accompany Sir John Hubbard to the funeral: "They could never forget all his kindness in another time of trouble."

It was a striking group of mourners. Alvar stood in the midst, dignified and impassive, and by his side a tall, girlish figure, with bright hair gleaming through her crape

veil, the three other brothers together, looking chiefly as if they were trying to preserve an unmoved demeanour; Rupert's face behind them, like enough to suggest kindred, and Judge Cheriton's keen cultivated face; Mr. Seyton, pale, worn, and white-haired, and his brother's tanned, weather-beaten countenance, ruddy and solemn, above his clerical dress. Many a fine, powerful form and handsome outline showed among the men, whose fathers had served Mr. Lester's; and behind, crowds of women, children, and old people filled the churchyard and the lanes beyond.

As the service proceeded the heavy clouds parted, and a sudden gleam of sunlight fell, lighting up the violet pall and the white wreaths laid on it, the surplices of the choristers, and the bent heads of the mourners. Cheriton looked up at last away from the open grave, through the break in the clouds, but with a face strangely white and sad in the momentary sunlight. Jack, as they

turned away, caught sight of Mr. Stanforth, and the sudden involuntary look of pleasure that lightened the poor boy's miserable face was touching to see. When all was over, and, in common with most of those from a distance, Mr. Stanforth had accompanied Sir John Hubbard up to the house, Jack sought him out, hardly having a word to say; but evidently finding satisfaction in his presence.

"Oh, we have nothing picturesque at home, but still I should like to show you Oakby," Cheriton had said, as they walked together in the beautiful streets of Seville; but the long table in the old oak dining-room, covered with family plate, the sombre, faded richness of colouring that told of years of settled dignified life, were not altogether commonplace, any more than the pair of brothers who occupied the two ends of the table. It was not till there was a general move that Cheriton came up and put his hand into his friend's.

"We all like to think that you have been here," he said. "You will come again while you are at Ashrigg?"

"I will, indeed. And you,—these cold winds do not hurt you?"

"No, I think not. My uncle wishes Sir John Hubbard to hear some of our arrangements; you will not mind waiting for a little."

He spoke very quietly, but as if there were a great weight upon him, while his attention was claimed by some parting guest.

"Well, Cheriton, good-bye; this is a sorrowful day for many. You must try and teach your poor brother to fill your father's place. We are all ready to welcome him among us, and we hope he will take an interest in everything here."

"You are very kind, Mr. Sutton," said Cheriton, rather as if he thought the kindness too outspoken.

Then a much older face and voice took a turn.

"Good-bye, my lad. Your grandfather and I were friends always, and I little thought to see this day. Keep things going, Cherry, for the old name's sake.

"I shall be in London soon," said Cherry ungraciously, for the echoes of his own forebodings were very hard to bear. Then Rupert came up with a warm hand-shake.

"Good-bye, my dear fellow. I hope we shall see you in London. Don't catch another bad cold. I hope you'll all get along together."

"I dare say we shall. But thank you, it was very good of you to come just now."

"Just off your wedding trip, as I understand?" said the old gentleman.

"Yes; we came back from Paris a few days ago, and I must get back to town to-night," said Rupert, as Cheriton moved away to join his uncle for a sort of explanation of the state of affairs to the younger ones, and for the reading of the will, though its chief provisions were well known to him.

Alvar, as his father had done before him, inherited the estate free from debt or mortgage, with such an income as sounded to his Spanish notions magnificent; but which those better versed in English expenditure knew would find ample employment in all the calls of such a place as Oakby. It was quite sufficient for the position, but no more. The estate, of course, still remained chargeable with old Mrs. Lester's jointure. Mr. Lester had enjoyed the interest of his wife's fortune during her life, the bulk of which had come to her from an aunt, and was secured to her daughter; her three sons succeeding to five thousand pounds apiece, and for this money Judge Cheriton, and a certain General Fleming, a relation of the Cheritons, were joint trustees. So the will, made almost as soon as Mr. Lester inherited the property, had stood, and indeed most of its provisions had been made by his father. Since his illness, however, a codicil had been added, stating that Mr. Lester had intended to leave

the small amount of ready money at his disposal equally among his three younger sons, but that now he decided to leave the whole to Cheriton, "whose health might involve him in more expenses, and prevent him from using the same exertions as his brothers." He also joined his two elder sons, with their uncle, Judge Cheriton, in the personal guardianship of John, Robert, and Annette. There were a few gifts and legacies to servants and dependants, and that was all.

"Nothing," remarked Judge Cheriton, after a pause, "could be more proper than this decision with regard to Cheriton, though we hope its necessity has passed away; but under the very peculiar circumstances every one has felt that it would have been well if a somewhat larger proportion of his mother's fortune could have come to him."

"Of course," said Jack, "it is all right."

"But my father might have trusted him to me," said Alvar.

"Such things should always be in black and white," said the judge. "Your father has shown marked confidence both in you and in Cheriton by giving you a share in the charge of the younger ones, and this desire will, of course, naturally affect our arrangements for them. Annette's home at least must be fixed by her grandmother's."

"But my grandmother will stay here," said Alvar, in a tone of surprise. "Why should she change? It will be all the same. And the boys too, and my sister, and Cheriton —of course—we must be together."

He spoke warmly, and crossing over to Cheriton, took his hand as he spoke.

"This is your home, my brother, always."

"You are *very* good to us, Alvar, thank you," said Cheriton, hardly able to speak.

"Most kind," said the judge; "whatever may be decided on, your offer is suggested by a most proper feeling, of which I hope all are sensible."

"Alvar is very kind," said Jack shyly.

"Would you not expect that Cheriton should be 'kind' to you? Then why not I, as well?" said Alvar.

"Such an arrangement," said the judge, "would not be *binding* on Cheriton even in your place. I am rejoiced to see so good an understanding between you. Alvar has a great deal of business before him, and it would be a pity to make any changes at present. But as for you, Cheriton, is it wise to remain here so early in the year?"

"No," said Alvar; "I think we should go to the south for a little."

"I think the calls upon your time—" began the judge, but Cheriton interposed.

"I don't think I am any the worse for the weather," he said, "and I should not like to go away now. We shall all have a great deal to do."

Sir John Hubbard spoke a few friendly words and offered any assistance or advice to Alvar in his power, and then took his leave, as did Mr. Malcolm. Alvar and Jack, with

the judge, accompanied them into the hall; and no sooner had the door of the study closed than Nettie, who had been a silent spectator of the scene, suddenly burst out,—

"I don't care! I will say it! It may be very kind of Alvar, but it is horrible, *horrible* to think *he* is master and may do what he pleases with us. I hate to stay here if *he* is to give us leave."

"I told you, Nettie," said Bob, with masculine prudence, "that no one ought to *say* those things."

"Nor feel them, I hope," said Cherry. "Nettie, my dear child, you must not make it worse for us all. We feel our great loss; but you know the future will not be easy for Alvar himself."

"I know," sobbed Nettie, with increasing vehemence, "that he will not be like—like papa. I can't *bear* to think that the dear place all belongs to *him*, and the things, and the animals even, and the horses. *He* doesn't love them, nor the place, and *we* do!"

"Be silent, Nettie," said Cheriton, with unusual sternness; "I will never listen to one word like this. There is nothing wrong about it. Think of all that Alvar has done for me, and then say if such words are justifiable."

The severity of the tone silenced Nettie—it was meant to silence poor Cheriton's own heart. He was stern to his sister because he felt severely towards himself; but Nettie thought him unjust, and only moved by partiality for Alvar. He saw complications far beyond her childish jealousy, and yet he shared it. And above all was the anguish of a personal loss, a heavy grief that filled up all the intervals of perplexing anticipations and business cares.

The twins went away together, and Cherry sat down in his father's chair and leaned his head back against the cushion of it. It was all over, all the love that had had so many last thoughts for him, and, alas! no last words. They had indeed parted for ever in

this life; but how differently from what he had expected last year. Over! and the future looked difficult and dark. "*He* does not love them, and we do." It was too true. Cherry was tired out with the long, hasty journey, the succeeding strain of occupation, and with the sorrow that weighed him down —a sorrow that only now seemed to come upon him in all its strength. He was not conscious of the passing of time till a hand was laid on his shoulder, and Alvar's voice said softly, "I have been looking for you, *Cherito mio*."

"Oh, I am very tired," said Cherry.

How strange it was to rouse himself from thoughts in which Alvar's image brought such a sense of trouble and perplexity, to feel the accustomed comfort of his presence! How strange to shrink so painfully from the thought of his foreign brother's rule in his father's place, and yet to feel the fretting weariness soothed insensibly by the care on which he had learned to depend. He could

not think this crooked matter straight, he could not even feel compunction for his own fears. He was tired and wretched, and Alvar knew just what was restful and comforting to him.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE NEW MASTER.

"Against each one did each contend,
And all against the heir."

By the next morning Cheriton's thoughts had cleared themselves, and matters began to take some shape; he could make up his mind to a certain line of conduct, or at least could place a distinct aim before him. He had often before been forced to acknowledge that Alvar's character, as well as his position, had its own rights; they must take him as they found him; neither his faults nor his excellencies were theirs—and how much Cherry owed to those very points in Alvar which had come on them like a surprise! Was it not the height both of ingratitude and of conceit to think of him as of one to be altered and influenced before he could be fit for his new station? Why would not

Alvar's gentleness, honour, and courtesy, his undoubted power of setting himself aside, make him as valuable a member of society as industry, integrity, and regard for those about him had made of his father? It was his misfortune, not his fault, that he was a square man in a round hole; and what could Cherry do but try to round off a few angles or poke a few corners for them to stick into? Was it prejudice and unworthy jealousy that made him unable to accept this view, or was there something in Nettie's vehement disapproval, however unkindly and arrogantly it was expressed? If Alvar chose he could make a very good Squire Lester. Yes, *if*— There was the question. The English Lesters sometimes did right, and sometimes —some of them very often—did wrong; but they one and all recognized that doing right was the business of their lives, and that if they did wrong they must repent and suffer. They certainly believed that "conduct is nine-tenths of life," in other words, that they must "do their duty in that state of life to which they were called."

But in Alvar this motive seemed almost non-existent. He did not care about his own duty or other people's. Only such a sense, or the strong influence of the religion from which in the main it sprang, or a sort of enthusiasm equally foreign to him, could have roused an indolent nature to the supreme effort of altering his whole way of living, of caring for subjects hitherto indifferent to him—in short, of changing his entire self. No doubt Alvar would think something due to his position, and something more to please Cheriton, but he would not regard shortcomings as of any consequence; in short, it was not that Alvar's principles were different from theirs, but that as motives of action he had not got any; not that he had Spanish instead of English notions of property, politics, or religion, but that he did not care to entertain any notions at all.

Cheriton understood enough now of the shifting scenes of Spanish life to understand that this might be their effect on an outsider who saw many different schemes of life all produce an equally bad effect on society; but

it was none the less peculiarly ill-adapted to an owner of English property; and he took leave to think that if Spanish gentlemen in past generations had administered justice in their own neighbourhoods, mended their own roads, and seen to the instruction of their own tenants, a happier state of things might have prevailed at the present time in the peninsula. Anyhow, to him, as to his father, the welfare of Oakby was very dear—dearer now than ever, for his father's sake. One thought had troubled Mr. Lester's last hours, that by his own conduct he had allowed Alvar to become unfit to succeed him: all, therefore, that Cheriton could do to remove that unfitness was so much work done for his father's sake; all, too, that made Alvar happy, was an undoing of the wrong that he had suffered. There was no real discord between what was right by Alvar and by Oakby and by his own sense of right. To make the best of Alvar, to allow for all his difficulties, to help him in every possible way, was not only due to that loving brother, but was the right way to be loyal to his

father's higher self, and to clear his memory from those weaknesses and errors which cling to every one in this mortal life—was, too, the only way to see his work carried on.

This "high endeavour" came to Cheriton, indeed, as "an inward light" to brighten the perplexed path before him. Sorrow, he had already learnt, could be borne, difficulties might be overcome, now that his inmost feelings were at peace.

Certainly he had enough on his hands. Much of the correspondence with old friends fell naturally to his share. English "business" was unintelligible to Alvar without his explanations, and though the new Squire showed himself perfectly willing to receive from Mr. Malcolm an account of the various sources of his income, and submitted to go through his father's accounts, and to hear reports from farmers and bailiffs, he always insisted on Cheriton's presence at these interviews; and though he was too easily satisfied with the fact that "my brother understands," no one could have

expected him to find it all quite easy to understand himself.

Cherry apologized for putting his finger in every pie.

"Oh," said Alvar cheerfully; "I could not make the pie if I put in both my hands."

But Cheriton knew perfectly well that the parish and the estate believed themselves to be entering on the reign of King Log. Any breakers, however, in this direction were still far ahead; but within doors difficulties and incongruities came sooner to a point, and Alvar was by no means always to blame for them.

On the day after the funeral, Mrs. Lester resumed her place in the family; but her son's death had aged her much, and to see Alvar in his place was gall and wormwood to her. She accepted his offer of a home, and thanked him for it with dignity and propriety; but she did not attempt to conceal from the young ones that she grudged him the power to make it.

The household arrangements went on as usual, and Alvar's behaviour to her was irre-

proachable in its courtesy and consideration; nor did she ever clash with him, but reserved her fears and her disapprobations for Cherry's benefit.

Nettie had come back from London at Christmas, and nothing more had been heard of Dick Seyton, who was then absent from home; but the recollection of that episode prompted Mrs. Lester to give a ready consent to Judge Cheriton's proposal that she should go at Easter to school for a year. Bob, too, who had been taken away from school at Christmas, where his career had not lately been satisfactory, was at present reading with a clergyman at Hazelby, and was to be sent to a tutor by-and-by. In the meantime, both he and Nettie were as unhappy as young creatures can be when their world is all changed for them; with their hearts yearning towards what they already called old times. And all the force of their natures concentrated into a sort of fierce, aggressive loyalty to every practice, opinion, and tradition of the past, and to this code they viewed Cherry as a traitor. It was a

cruel offence when he happened to say that he liked to drink chocolate, and when Alvar made a point of his having some; when Alvar now and again used Spanish expressions in speaking to him, when he pronounced Spanish names in Spanish fashion, or, worst of all, regretted Spanish sunshine; when he yielded to Alvar's care for his health, or seemed to turn to him for sympathy—a hundred such pin-pricks occurred every day. And yet the foolish twins scrupulously did what they thought their duty. That Alvar owned their father's horses cost Nettie floods of tears; but she insisted on Bob asking his permission before he took one to ride to Hazelby, and she always showed him a kind of sulky deference.

"How can you be so silly, Nettie?" said Jack, in answer to a pettish remark. "Do you want Cherry to quarrel with Alvar?"

"No," said Nettie; "but I didn't think he would have *liked* Spain, and have talked so much about the pictures and things. Last night he asked Alvar to play to him."

"I should think you might be glad to see

him pleased with anything; he looks wretched enough."

"Well, *I* like what I'm used to," said Nettie, in a choked voice. "I don't care to hear about all the stupid people you met in Spain."

"The friends we made in Spain," said Jack, in high indignation, "were people with whom it was a privilege to associate."

"I daresay," said Nettie; "but old acquaintances are good enough for me; and old weather and everything. Yes, Buffer, *I'll* take you out, if it *is* a nasty cold morning."

And Nettie went off, with a train of dogs behind her, angry with all her brothers, for even Bob had had the sense to grumble out "that people must do as they pleased, and she had better let Cherry and Alvar alone," and feeling as if she only were faithful to the dear home standard.

As Jack stood by the hall fire, heavy-hearted enough himself, in spite of his rebuke to his sister, there was a ring at the bell, and the cloud cleared from his brow as

he started forward to greet Mr. Stanforth with an eagerness unusual with him.

He was too unaffectedly pleased to be embarrassed, and began almost at once,—

"My uncle Cheriton comes back to us to-night. He had to leave us on the day after we saw you; Cherry has promised to speak to him, that we may come to an understanding before I go back to Oxford."

Mr. Stanforth smiled a little.

"When do you come of age, Jack?" he said.

"I shall be twenty next week," said Jack, in a tone of humiliation. "If I take a fair degree, I shall try for a mastership in one of the public schools. I should like that, and —and it is suitable to getting married," concluded Jack blushing.

"Very well," said Mr. Stanforth. "Then you shall come and tell me of your intentions for the future in a year's time from next week. Wait a bit," as Jack looked exceedingly blank. "If circumstances had not so sadly changed, no other decision would have been possible for you. I have

no objection, in the meantime, to see you occasionally at my house, as I think you should both have every opportunity of testing the permanence of such quick-springing feelings."

Mr. Stanforth smiled as he spoke; but Jack said after a moment,—

"You mean that I must earn her? Well, I will."

There was a solemn abruptness in Jack's manner that provoked a smile; but his self-confidence was tempered by a look of such absolute honesty and sincerity in his bright blue eyes, he looked such a fine young fellow in all the freshness and strength of his youth, that it would have been difficult to doubt either his purposes or his power of carrying them out.

"Don't you think you might have asked Mr. Stanforth to take off his coat and come into the library before entering on such an important subject?" said Cheriton, joining them.

"I beg your pardon," said Jack. "Please come in; I was not thinking—"

"Of anything but your own affairs? No, that's very unfair, for I am sure you have taken heed to every one else's," said Cherry, as he led the way into the library, where on the table was a great accumulation of papers, looking like the materials for a heavy morning's work.

Cherry sent Jack to find Alvar, and told him to order some wine to be brought into the library, apologizing to Mr. Stanforth for not asking him to lunch, as their grandmother was unequal to seeing a stranger; and then, in Jack's absence, he listened to Mr. Stanforth's ultimatum, and owned that it was a great relief not to have to startle his relations just now with what would seem an incongruous proposal; but praising Jack's sense and consideration in their trouble, and speaking of him with a kind of tender pride, unlike the tone of one so nearly on the same level of age, and whose life also was but beginning. He said that he should come to London at Easter, but that in the meanwhile there was much to be done at home. English affairs were naturally puzzling to

Alvar, and a great deal of the business concerned them all.

"You must remember that you ought to be still taking holiday," said Mr. Stanforth.

"Oh, yes. At least Alvar and Jack never let me forget it. But, indeed, I am quite well, and though I feel the cold, I don't think it means to hurt me. It is better to have plenty to do."

Cherry's manner was not uncheerful, and though he looked pale and delicate, there was no longer the appearance of broken health and spirits which had marked him at their first acquaintance; but the quick, changeable brightness was gone also. He was like one carrying a load which took all his strength; but he carried it without staggering.

Alvar now came in with Jack, looking bright and cordial.

"My brother is teaching me how to be the Squire," he said to Mr. Stanforth, with a smile, as he put aside the papers to make room for the tray that had been ordered; "but I am not a good scholar."

"You must go regularly to school, then," said Mr. Stanforth.

"Ah," said Alvar; "I must know, it seems, about rents, and tenants, and freeholds — so many things. But there is something that we wish to ask of Mr. Stanforth, is there not, Cherry?"

"Yes—we spoke of it."

"It is that he will try to make a drawing of our father for us, for there is none that my brothers like."

"I will try with pleasure, but I am afraid likenesses, under the circumstances, are rarely quite satisfactory. You have a photograph?"

Jack produced a very bad daguerreotype, and a photograph taken for Cheriton before he left home.

"This is a good likeness," he said; "but Cherry thinks it wants fire and spirit."

"I will take both," said Mr. Stanforth, seeing that Cherry had turned aside from the photograph, and took no part in the discussion. "I will make a little sketch, and when you are in London you can tell me

what you wish about it. And now I think I must be getting back to Ashrigg; to-morrow I go home."

Jack eagerly said that to-morrow he was going to London on his way to Oxford, and received the longed-for permission to call at Kensington. Poor boy! he could not keep himself from looking ecstatically happy even while he told Mr. Stanforth, as he walked through the park with him, how sorry he was to leave Cheriton with so much on his hands.

Cheriton himself would gladly have kept Jack beside him. He was capable of seeing both sides of the difficult question, and was, moreover, so individual and independent in his modes of thought, that home matters were less personal to him. He had, too, his own hopes, and had chalked out his own career, so that, young as he was, he was a support to Cherry's spirits, even while more than half the reason why his own were less overpowered was that the brother who was all in all to him was still left. His presence did not always conduce to peace with Bob,

for he had grown away from him, and was disposed to lecture him; but though he departed with more good advice to his family than was necessary, he left another gap, and Cherry, trying to rouse himself from the added feeling of loneliness, went over to Elderthwaite to see the old parson. He had been away so long that every familiar place brought fresh associations, and he tried to get the first sight of each one over quickly and alone.

He could not walk past the stables and through the farm-buildings without the image of his father meeting him at every turn. Here they had planned a new fence together, in this direction the very last walk he had had strength for before leaving home had been taken. How well he remembered *then* sitting on that bench under the stable wall, and watching his father with a sad wonder if he should ever sit there again. This was the short way from the station by which he used to come home from school. Here his father used to meet him—nay, suddenly he recollected, with a memory that

started into life after lying asleep for years, *here* he had parted for the last time from his mother, and the long-past grief seemed to come back in the light of the new one. He said to himself that he ought to rejoice in the thought that his parents were once more together; but in the strangest way he longed for this long-lost mother to comfort him in the new grief of his father's death.

And then he walked on through the fir plantation, across the bit of bare, bleak fell, into the woods of Elderthwaite. And as he walked he thought of Jack's bright hopes, and of that sweet and promising future that was to make up to him for all that the past had taken from him. Here, by the broken stile and ruinous wall, all hope of such a future had been dashed away from Cheriton's heart. *This* memory had no sweetness to temper its pain; and he hurried on through the plantation and down the lane that led to the vicarage. As he passed the church he saw that some one was trimming the ivy round the windows, and it struck him that they had been cleaned, and that the whole

place had a somewhat improved appearance. A little girl made him a curtsey; she wore a smart red flannel hood, and had a clean face; he thought that he had never seen an Elderthwaite child look so respectable. Nay, as he passed one of the larger cottages, it shone upon him resplendent with whitewash, and looking in at the open door he beheld a row of desks, and sundry boys and girls seated thereat, and with curiosity much excited by this evidence of reform, he hastened on towards the vicarage.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

PLANS AND EXPERIMENTS.

"I am sick of the hall and the hill, I am sick of the moor and the main."

VIRGINIA SEYTON had spent her Christmas at Littleton, and after returning to London for her cousin Ruth's marriage, had come home again at the end of January. At Littleton, more than one old friend had advised her to reconsider her resolve to live at Elderthwaite; but Virginia did not feel herself tempted by any proposal of cottage, however charming, or companionship, however congenial. She had been lonely, unhappy, and forlorn at Elderthwaite; but somehow it pulled at her heart-strings. She could not rejoice over all the well-ordered services at Littleton, much as they refreshed

her spirits, as she did over the new hymn which she and Mrs. Clements drilled into the Elderthwaite children; and she found herself believing, when receiving the correct answers of her former scholars, that there was after all "something" in the north-country intellect, however untrained, that was superior in quality, if not in quantity, to that of the south. When she went back to London, common acquaintances brought her into contact with the Stanforths. She and Ruth went to an evening party at their house, just as Mr. Stanforth and Gipsy returned from Spain, and were invited to come afterwards and see the Spanish sketches. Ruth was glad to make all the business that pressed on her an excuse for refusing; but Virginia went, and was happier than she had been for months in hearing Alvar spoken of, and spoken of in terms of praise. Neither girl was conscious of the other's interest in this meeting—how Gipsy listened to "some one who had known Jack all his life," how Virginia watched Alvar's recent companion; but Gipsy's blushes came in the right place,

and in spite of her extreme amaze at the idea of Jack in this new capacity, Virginia guessed where the spark had been lighted, and so could listen fearlessly to the story of the adventures at Ronda, and could look with pleasure at the sketches of which Alvar's figure was a picturesque element. It was a pleasant peep at a new life linked with her old one.

Ruth's was a very brilliant wedding. Everything was arranged by her grandmother, and bridesmaids, dresses, breakfast, and even church, were all chosen with exact regard to the correct fashion of the moment. Ruth wished it all to be over that she might find herself away with Rupert; then perhaps she would feel at rest. As it was, their rapid, interrupted surface intercourse tantalized her almost as much as their occasional interviews in the days of secrecy and silence. And when they were alone, Ruth was afraid to go deep. Often had she said, "In *my* love there shall be perfect confidence; there shall be nothing between my soul and his." And now her past transgression, however

excusable it might seem, erred against this perfect confidence. And Rupert's "soul" was not at all ready to display itself to her, or to himself either, partly because he was not serious in his emotions, any more than in his principles, but partly also because he not unnaturally considered that when his deeds were satisfactory to Ruth, it was quite unnecessary to analyze his feelings. So she had no encouragement to confidence, and the perfect union for which she had longed, disappointed her, partly through her past falsity, but more from the want of any common aim or principle to unite them. Ruth was fairly happy; but she was the same Ruth still, with a nature that could never be satisfied without earnestness equalling her own, an earnestness from the purity and simplicity of which she had turned aside to seek a sort of consecration of life *which only a man of high principle and strong purpose could really have helped her to find*, in a love which she thought more powerful because it was more regardless of duty, in which view she did but follow much teaching and many writers.

Ruth did not make the confession which would have set her right with herself if not with Rupert, she had practised too much self-pleasing to find the courage for it. She married; and as life went on her aspirations would either die into the commonplace she had despised, or she might be driven to satisfy them elsewhere than with Rupert.

And Virginia, who equally with Ruth idealized life and its relations, and who also found her ideal unfulfilled—unfulfilled, but not destroyed. She had lost her lover, but the good and holy life which she had thought to lead with him, though its beauty took a sterner cast, was possible without him. Life was not purposeless, though it was very difficult, and poor Virginia was diffident of her own powers, and was, moreover, in many ways ill-fitted to live with those whose views of life were uncongenial to her.

"If I had more tact I should get on better at home; if I had had more patience, more charity, I should not have quarrelled with Alvar," she thought, and with some truth. But when she came back to Elderthwaite it

was coming home. Dick and Harry were glad to see her; her father said it looked cheerful to have her about again; the little housemaid, whom she had taught for an hour on Sundays, was enchanted, and had written copies and learnt hymns in her absence; while she could not but be welcome to her aunt, whom she found suffering from a severe attack of rheumatism, which confined her to her room. Virginia had no natural skill in nursing, and Miss Seyton was not fond of attentions. But, though she was severely uncomplaining, Virginia's companionship was enlivening, and, moreover, while she was incapacitated, her niece was obliged to manage the house. She had bought enough bitter experience now not to be frightened and startled at the state of things, and she perceived how much Miss Seyton had done to keep things straight. But the young, fresh influence brightened up the old dependents, and she managed, too, to introduce some little comfort. But a piece of home work really within her powers came to her in an unexpected quarter. Dick's examina-

tion was to take place in about six weeks, and she found from Harry that he had been really reading for it, and to her great surprise and pleasure he did not resent her interest in it. Her French, and history, and arithmetic were quite enough in advance of Dick's to make her aid valuable to him, and finding how much he was behindhand, spite of some honest though fitful efforts, she gave him some lessons with the tutor at Hazelby to whom Bob Lester was sent, and as Dick always brought his papers to her afterwards, there was no question that he actually availed himself of the opportunity.

As for the old parson, he greeted her with a perfect effusion of delight. He had come to love her better than anything in the world except Cheriton, whose illness had been a real sorrow to him. The little improvements had not been allowed to languish—indeed others had been projected. Mr. Clements had not been idle. A poor widow, whose continued respectability had certainly been partly owing to her attachment to Mr. Seyton's rival or assistant, "the old Methody,"

had a niece who had been trained as a pupil-teacher in a parish belonging to a friend of Mr. Ellesmere's, and, her health failing, the girl had come to live with her aunt. Hence a proposal for a little day-school; and actually a subscription set on foot by Mr. Clements.[1]

"So you see, Miss Seyton," he had said, "we have not been quite idle in your absence."

"Indeed," said Virginia, smiling, "you seem to have done better without me."

"No, Miss Seyton, whatever better things we may succeed in doing in Elderthwaite in the future, it is your doing that the wish to improve had been awakened."

Virginia blushed at this magnificent compliment; but it was true. High principle, recommended by gentleness and humility, must in the end win its way.

These various changes formed a safe subject of conversation in a meeting that could not fail on many accounts to be trying, when

[1] This of course took place before the passing of the Education Act.

Cheriton, as he came up to the vicarage, met Virginia going in there also. He did not want to talk about his own health or home difficulties, she could not fail to be conscious; but the parson was only restrained, or *not* restrained, by her presence from lamentations over Alvar's succession, and looked unspeakably wicked when Cherry implied that they were getting on smoothly. So the new school came in handy, and Parson Seyton talked about a "Government grant," and winked at Cherry over his shoulder.

"It's all getting beyond me, Cherry," he said; "I'm not the man for these new lights."

"You'll have to get a curate, parson," said Cherry.

"Nay—nay!" said the parson sharply. "I'll have no strangers prying into all our holes and corners, and raking out the dust. I don't like curates—hate their long coats and long faces."

"You might put in the advertisement 'round and rosy preferred,'" said Cherry.

"Nay, nay, my lad; no curates for me, unless *you* will apply for the situation."

"Cherry has a *very* long coat on," said Virginia, smiling and pointing to his "ulster."

"And not too round a face nowadays, eh? Never mind, if he came here I'd let him wear—"

"A cassock, perhaps," said Cheriton. "I feel all the force of the compliment. But I think Queenie is the best curate for Elderthwaite at present."

Virginia's heart danced at the familiar brotherly name by which Cheriton had learned from Ruth to call her in the days of her engagement, but which had never become her home appellation, and something in her face made him whisper under his breath as she rose to take leave,—

"Though Oakby grudges her to you."

Virginia hurried away, but she was presently overtaken by Cheriton as she paused at a cottage door, and they walked up the lane together, and talked of the Stanforths; and when Virginia praised Gipsy, neither could help a smile of implied comprehension and sympathy.

It was a bright, pleasant day, the puddles and ditches of the Elderthwaite hedgerows sparkled in the spring sunshine, the blackthorn put out its shy blossoms on each side. Virginia smiled and looked up gaily, and Cheriton's voice took its natural lively tone as he related some of the humours of their Spanish journey.

"I must turn off here," said Cherry, as they came to a stile. But Virginia did not answer him, for, leaning against the fence, stood Alvar, watching them as they approached. A hayrick and tumble-down cart-shed, and a waggon with its poles turned up in the air, formed a strangely incongruous background for his graceful figure, his deep mourning giving him an additional air of picturesque dignity.

There was no escape for Virginia. She turned exceedingly pale, but with a self-command that, in Cheriton's opinion, did her infinite credit, she bowed—she had not courage to put out her hand—and said timidly,—

"Good morning."

Alvar's olive face coloured all over; he bowed, for once utterly and evidently at a loss, while Cherry plunged into the breach.

"Hallo, Alvar, have you come to look for me? I have been to see Parson Seyton. You have no idea what grand doings there are now in Elderthwaite."

"I did not come to look for you," said Alvar, with some emphasis.

"Well, I was coming home."

Then Alvar turned, and with a sort of haughty politeness hoped that Mr. and Miss Seyton were well; and Virginia, in the sweet tones unheard for so many months, replied to him, and after shaking hands with Cheriton, walked away down the sunny lane, from which she could not turn aside, and which afforded no shelter from any eyes that might choose to follow her.

Alvar, however, turned away, and Cherry following, said,—

"I think a little light will dawn on Elderthwaite one day, thanks to Virginia."

Alvar did not make any answer, and

Cheriton was not at all sorry to see how much the meeting had disturbed him.

He never alluded to it again, but whether from any feelings connected with it or from the worries of his new position, he was less even-tempered than usual.

There was much to try him. So many matters pressed on him, and he was so very much at fault as to the way of dealing with them. Mr. Lester had kept a considerable portion of his property in his own hands; he had also been a most active magistrate, sat upon innumerable county committees, and had united in his own person the chief lay offices of the parish. In all these capacities he had done a considerable amount of useful work, and though no one expected Alvar to take up the whole of it, he ought to have endeavoured to make himself master of the more necessary parts.

But the real defect of Alvar's nature—the intense pride, that made the sense of being at a disadvantage hateful to him—worked at first in a wrong direction. The great effort of bending himself to learn to do badly what

those around him could do well, was beyond one who had never felt the need of repentance, never acknowledged an error in himself; nor did the sense of duty to his neighbour, that counteracted this tendency in others of his name, appeal to the conscience of one who inherited the selfish instincts of the Spanish grandee. After the very first he grew impatient of the tasks that were so new to him, and yet resentful of any comment on his behaviour. He resented the standard to which he would not conform, all the more because an unspeakable soreness connected it with Virginia's rejection of him.

Perhaps this was more hopeful than his former good-humoured indifference, but it was with exceeding pain that Cheriton, before Easter came, began to perceive that though Alvar would let him please himself in any special instance, his hopes of exerting any general influence were vain, and that Alvar would resent the attempt even from him.

"*Did* you expect to make the leopard change his spots by the force of your will, Cherry?" said Mr. Ellesmere to him, when

some instance had brought this prominently forward. "You cannot do it, my boy, and excuse me for saying that I think you should not try."

"I only wanted to help the leopard to accommodate his coat to our climate," said Cherry, with rather a difficult smile.

"He must do that himself when stress of weather shows him the need. If he had married, such an influence as your mother's might have come into his life; but, my dear boy, *even* that could not have sufficed, unless it had appealed to something higher."

"I know," said Cherry slowly. "I know what you mean about it. No man ought to stand dictation as to his duty, and we all lay down the law to each other. But I cannot break myself of feeling that matters here are my own concern."

"I think that is a habit of mind common to a great many people hereabouts," said Mr. Ellesmere kindly; "and, after all, what I said was only meant as a warning."

"Much needed! But I believe Alvar will find things out in time; and we none

of us make half enough allowance for him."

Jack came home for a few days at Easter, and there was a final discussion and arrangement of plans, which resulted after all in a general flitting. Alvar declared that Oakby was too dull without his brother, and that he should himself go to London for some time. No one could exactly find fault with this scheme, and if he had exerted himself hitherto to get his new duties in train, they would have welcomed it, as his resolute avoidance of the Seytons produced social difficulties, and Jack thought Cheriton's London life so much of an experiment as to be glad that he should not have to carry it out entirely alone. But they both knew that without any difference that would strike outsiders, there was just the essential change from good to bad management, from care to neglect, in every matter with which the master of Oakby was concerned.

Nettie was to go to a London boarding-school for a year. This was the express desire of Mrs. Lester, who thought this

amount of "finishing" essential. Lady Cheriton was choosing the school, and the brothers of course consented, though Cheriton felt that it was like caging a wild bird, and Alvar remarked with much truth,—

"My sister is a woman; it is foolish to send her to school."

Nettie wept torrents of tears over Rolla, Buffer, her pony, nay, every living creature about the place; but she did not resist, it was part of the plan of life to which she was accustomed.

If Mrs. Lester herself had not insisted on sending Nettie away, the others would have made no proposal which involved a separation; but to the surprise of them all, she proposed spending the ensuing three months at Whitby. Lady Milford would be there, and it had always been an occasional resort of Mrs. Lester's, and with her old favourite maid, she declared that she should be perfectly comfortable there; and if she was dull, she would ask Virginia Seyton to stay with her.

One other member of the family remained to be disposed of, and while Cheriton and Jack were consulting with each other what they could say to their uncle with regard to Bob, he took the matter into his own hands, and as he walked across the park with Cheriton to view some drainage operations which had been begun by their father, and which Alvar was very glad to let them superintend, he remarked suddenly,—

"Cherry, I wish you would let me go to Canada, or New Zealand, or some such place, and take land. It is the only thing I'm fit for."

Cheriton was taken by surprise, though the idea had crossed his own mind.

"Do you really wish it?" he said.

"Yes," said Bob. "I'm not going to try my hand in life at things other fellows can beat me at."

"I'm afraid that rule would limit the efforts of most of us!"

"Well," said Bob, "I hate feeling like a fool; and besides, I don't see the good of Latin and Greek. But I mean to do some-

thing that's some use in the world. I approve of colonizing."

"Really, Bob," said Cherry, "I don't think you were ever expected to go in for more Latin and Greek than would prevent you from feeling like a fool. There's a great deal in what you say; but have you thought of a farm in England or Scotland?"

"Yes; but I think that is generally a fine name for doing nothing. Now, I shall have some capital, and I'm big and strong, and can make my way. Cherry, don't you think I should have been allowed to go?"

"Yes, Bob, I think you would; but you are too young to start off at once on your own resources."

"Well, I could go to the agricultural college for a year, and there are men out there who take fellows and give them a start. You can talk it over with Uncle Cheriton, and if you agree, I don't care for the others."

"Does Nettie know about it?"

"Yes," said Bob; "she wouldn't speak to me for a week, she was so sorry. But

she came round, and says she shall come out and join me. Of course she won't—she'll get married."

They had reached a little bridge which crossed a stream, on either side of which lay the swampy piece of ground which they had come to inspect. Looking forward, was the wide panorama of heathery hills, known to them with life-long knowledge; looking back, the wide, white house, in its group of fir-trees, with the park stretching away towards the lake. All the woods were tinted with light spring green, and the air was full of the song of numberless birds, and with that cawing of the rooks, which Cheriton had once said at Seville was to him like the sound of the waves to a person born by the sea.

"Of course," said Bob, "if one went a hundred thousand miles, one would never forget this old place."

"No," said Cheriton; "nor, I sometimes fancy, if one went a longer journey still!"

"But I hate it as it is now, and I shall

come back when you're Lord Chancellor, and Jack, Head Master of Eton."

"Well, Bob," said Cherry, "wherever we may any of us go, or whatever we may be, I think we cannot be really parted, while we remember the old place, and all that belongs to it."

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE DRAGON SLAYER.

"Life has more things to dwell on
Than just one useless pain."

THERE are few places where the charm of a bright June day is felt more perfectly than in a London garden. The force of contrast may partly account for this; but The Laurels, as the Stanforths' house was called, was a lovely place in itself, dating from days before the villas by which it was now almost surrounded. Within its old brown sloping walls flourished white and pink acacias, magnolias, westerias, and quaint trees only found in such old gardens; a cork-tree, more curious than beautiful; a catalpa, which once in Gipsy's memory had put out its queer brown and white blossoms; and a

Judas-tree, still purple with its lovely flowers. The house, like the garden-walls, was built of brown old brick, well draped with creepers; and Mr. Stanforth's new studio had been so cunningly devised that it harmonized wonderfully with the rest. That garden was a very pleasant place in the estimation of a great many people, who liked to come and idle away an hour there, and was famous for pleasant parties all through the summer; while it was a delightful play-place for the little Stanforths, a large party of picturesque and lively-minded children, who, in spite of artistic frocks and hats, and tongues trained to readiness by plenty of home society, were very thoroughly educated and carefully brought up. They were a great amusement to Cheriton Lester, who was always a welcome guest at The Laurels, and felt himself thoroughly at home there.

Cheriton's London life was in many ways a pleasant one. He found himself in the midst of old friends and schoolfellows, he could have as much society as he wished for, he was free of his uncle's house and of the

Stanforths', and he had none of the money anxieties which troubled many of those who, like him, were beginning their course of preparation for a legal life. He saw a good deal, in and out, of Alvar, who had established himself in town, and was an exceedingly popular person in society; and as the obligations of his mourning, which he was careful to observe, diminished, was full of engagements of all sorts, enjoyed himself greatly, and thought as little of Oakby as business letters allowed. Lady Cheriton thought that he ought to have every opportunity of settling, "so much the best thing for all of them," and arranged her introductions to him accordingly; but Alvar walked through snares and pitfalls, and did not even get himself talked of in connexion with any young lady. Cheriton was much less often to be met with; he found that he could not combine late hours and anything like study, and so kept his strength for his more immediate object—an object which, however, was slowly changing into an occupation. Cheriton soon found out that the pleasures

and pains of hard and successful labour were no longer for him; that though he did not break down in the warm summer weather, the winter would always be a time of difficulty, and that his strength would not endure a long or severe strain—in short, that though reading for the bar was just as well now as anything else for him, and might lead the way to interests and occupations, he could not even aim at the career of a successful lawyer. Besides, London air made him unusually languid and listless.

"Yes, he is a clever fellow, but he is not strong enough to do much. It is a great pity, but, after all, he has enough to live on, and plenty of interests in life," said Judge Cheriton; and his wife made her house pleasant to Cherry, and encouraged him to come there at all hours, and no one ever said a word to him about working, or gave him good advice, except not to catch cold; while he himself ceased to talk at all about his prospects, but went on from day to day and took the pleasant things that came to him. And sometimes he felt as if his last

hope in life was gone—and sometimes, again, wondered why he did not care more for such a disappointment. But now and then, in these days that were so silent and self-controlled, there came to him an indifference of a nobler kind, an inward courage, a consoling trust, the reward of much struggling, which a year ago he could never have brought to bear on such a trial.

Mr. Stanforth's presence always gave him a sense of sympathy, and he spent so many hours at The Laurels, that his aunt suspected him of designs on Gipsy, though Jack's secret, preserved in his absence, was likely to ooze out now that the end of the Oxford term had brought him to London for a few days, previous to joining a reading party with some of his friends.

The Laurels, with its pretty garden, might be a pleasant resting-place for Cheriton, but it was a very Arcadia, a fairy-land to Jack, when he found his way there late on one splendid afternoon, so shy that he had walked up and down the road twice before he rang the bell, happy, uncomfortable, and conscious

all at once, looking at Gipsy, who had just come home from a garden party, in a most becoming costume of cream colour and crimson, but quite unable to say a word to her, as she sat under the trees, and fanned herself with a great black fan, appealing to Alvar, who was there with Cheriton, whether she had quite forgotten her Spanish skill. Gipsy was very happy, and not a bit shy as she peeped at her solemn young lover over the top of the fan, and laughed behind it at Jack's look of disgust when Cherry remarked that he had grown since Easter.

"Don't be spiteful, Cherry," said Mr. Stanforth, with a smile. "Shall we come and see the picture?"

Jack and Gipsy were left to the last as they came up towards the house, and she made a little mischievous gesture of measuring herself against him.

"Yes, I think it's true!"

"Well," said Jack gruffly, though his eyes sparkled, "I shall leave off growing some time, I suppose. I say, are you going to dine at my aunt's to-morrow?"

"Yes," said Gipsy. "Lady Cheriton has been here, and she brought your sister. How handsome she is; but she was so silent. I was afraid of her. I wonder if she liked me," said Gipsy, blushing in her turn.

"Shy with Nettie?" exclaimed Jack. "You might as well be shy of a wild cat. She doesn't like any one much but Bob and her pets."

"Ah, young ladies grow as well as young gentlemen," said Gipsy. "Next year—"

"Yes; next year—" said Jack; but Gipsy opened the studio door, and ended the conversation.

Mr. Stanforth's studio was arranged with a view more to the painting of pictures than to the display of curtains, carpets, and china; but it was still a pretty and pleasant place, with a few rare works of art by other hands than those of its owner. There were few finished pictures of Mr. Stanforth's there then; but one large canvas on which he was working, and, besides various portraits in different stages, the drawing of Mr. Lester, which Jack had not hitherto seen. Mr.

Stanforth brought it forward, and asked him to make any comment that occurred to him. It was a fine drawing of a fine face, and brought out forcibly the union of size and strength with beauty which none of the sons fully equalled, though there might be more to interest in all their faces. For, after all, the little imperfections of expression, that which was wanting as well as that which was present in the coming out and going in, the pleasures, the duties, and the failures, the changes of mood and temper, the smiles and the frowns of daily life, had made the individual man, and could not be shown in a likeness so taken. It was a picture that would satisfy them better as the years went by. Indeed Alvar thought it perfect, and Jack could hardly say that he saw anything wanting; but Cherry, after many praises and some hesitation, had said, "Yes, it is very like, but it is as if one saw him from a distance. Perhaps that is best."

After this picture had been put away, Jack began to look round and to relieve the impression made on him by a little artistic

conversation, evidently carefully studied from the latest Oxford authorities. He looked at the pictures on the wall, found fault so correctly with what would have naturally been pleasing to him, and admired so much what a few months before he would have thought hideous, that Cheriton's eyes sparkled with fun, and Alvar, for once appreciating the humour of the situation, said,—

"We must ask Jack to write a book about the pictures at Oakby;" while Gipsy, seeing it all, laughed, spite of herself.

"Ah, Gipsy, he is carrying his lady's *colours*, like a true knight," said Cherry softly, as Jack faced round and inquired,—

"What are you laughing at?"

"Who lectures on art at Oxford, Jack?" said Cherry. "What a first-rate fellow he must be!"

"Ah, he is indeed a great teacher," said Alvar, "who has taught Jack to love art."

"A mighty teacher," said Cherry, under his breath.

"Of course," said Jack, "as one sees

more of the world, one comes to take an interest in new fields of thought."

"Why, yes," said Gipsy, recovering from Cherry's words, and flying to the rescue, "we all learned a great deal about art at Seville."

"My dear," said Mrs. Stanforth, "aren't you going to show them the knights?"

For she thought to herself that if a year was to pass before Jack's intentions could meet with an acknowledgment, his visits had better be few and far between, especially in the presence of Cherry's mischievous encouragement. "Mr. Stanforth himself being as bad," as she afterwards remarked to him.

Now, however, Mr. Stanforth turned his easel round and displayed the still unfinished picture for which he had begun to make sketches in Spain, when struck with the contrast of his new acquaintances, and with the capabilities of their appearance for picturesque treatment.

The picture was to be called "One of the Dragon Slayers," and represented a woodland glade in the first glory of the earliest summer

—blue sky, fresh green, white blossoms, and springing bluebells and primroses, all in full and yet delicate sunshine—a scene which might have stood for many a poetic description from Chaucer to Tennyson, a very image of nature, the same now as in the days of Arthur.

Dimly visible, as if he had crawled away among the brambles and bracken to die, was the gigantic form of the slain dragon, while, newly arrived on the scene, having dismounted from his horse, which was held by a page in the distance, was a knight in festal attire—a vigorous, graceful presentment of Alvar's dark face and tall figure—who with one hand drew towards him the delivered maiden, a fair, slender figure in the first dawn of youth, who clung to him joyfully, while he laid the other in eager gratitude on the shoulder of the dragon slayer, who, manifestly wounded in the encounter, was leaning against a tree-trunk, and who, as he seemed to give the maiden back to her lover, with the other hand concealed in his breast a knot of the ribbon on her dress; thus hinting at the

story, which after all was better told by the peculiar beaming smile of congratulation, the look of victory amid strife, of conquest over self and suffering—a look of love conquering pain, which was the real point of the picture.

Jack stood looking in silence, and uttering none of his newly-acquired opinions.

"Is it right, Jack?" said Mr. Stanforth.

"Yes, I know," said Jack briefly; and then, "Every one will know Alvar's portrait. And who is the lady?"

"She is a little niece of mine—almost a child," said Mr. Stanforth; while Cheriton interposed,—

"It is not a group of photographs, Jack. Of course the object was the idea of the picture, not our faces."

"Well, Cherry," said Mr. Stanforth smiling, "your notion of sitting for your picture partakes of the photographic. You did not help me by calling up the dragon slayer's look."

"That was for the artist to supply," said Cherry; "but it seems to me exactly how the knight ought to have looked."

"For my part," said Alvar, "I should not have liked to have been too late."

"It is very beautiful," said Jack; "but I don't think I approve of false mediævalism. At that date these fellows would have fought, and the best man would have had the girl."

"Pray, at what date do you fix the dragon?" said Cherry.

"Jack is as matter-of-fact as the maiden herself," said Mrs. Stanforth, "who will not be happy because her uncle will not tell her if the knight got well and married somebody else."

"No—no, mamma," said one of the Stanforth girls, "he did no such thing; he was killed in King Arthur's last battle. We settled it yesterday—we thought it was nicer."

"You don't think he gave in to the next dragon?" said Cherry, half to tease her.

"No, indeed, that knight never gave in. Did he, papa—did he?"

"My dear Minnie, I am not prepared with my knights' history. There they are, and I leave them to an intelligent public,

who can settle whether my object was to paint sunlight on primroses, or a smile on a wounded knight's face—very hard matters both."

"Don't you really like it?" said Gipsy aside to Jack.

"Oh, yes," said Jack uneasily, "I have seen him look so. I know what your father means. But I hate it. I'd rather have had a picture of him as he used to be, all sunburnt and jolly. Yes, I know, it's the picture, not Cherry; but I don't like it."

Gipsy demurred a little, and they fell into a long talk in the twilight garden. Jack kept his promise, he did not "make love" to her, but never, even to Cheriton, had he talked as he talked then, for if he might not talk of the future, he could at least make Gipsy a sharer in all his past. When Cheriton came out upon them to call Jack away, they looked at him with half-dazzled eyes, as if he were calling them back from fairy-land.

The dinner-party at Lady Cheriton's offered no such chances, though it was a

gathering together quite unexpected by some of the party. Lady Cheriton, when the question of a school for Nettie had been discussed, had renewed her offer of having her to share the studies of her younger daughters; and Cheriton, who thought that Nettie in a London boarding-school would be very troublesome to others and very unhappy herself, had succeeded in getting the plan adopted. So here she was, dignified and polished, in her long black dress, and bent, so said her aunt, in a silent and grudging fashion, on acquiring sufficient knowledge to hold her own among other girls. She was wonderfully handsome, and so tall that her height and presence marked her out as much as her intensely red-and-white complexion and yellow hair. There, too, were Virginia and her brother Dick, Cherry being guilty of assuring his aunt that there was no reason why Alvar should not meet them. For Dick's examination had at length been successfully passed, and an arrangement had been made that he should board with some friends of Mr. Stanforth's, and Virginia had

availed herself of an invitation from Lady Cheriton to come to London with him.

"You did not tell me she was coming," said Alvar angrily to Cheriton.

"It is impossible that you should avoid so near a neighbour," replied Cherry.

"I do not like it," said Alvar; and the effect on him was to shake his graceful self-possession, make him uncertain of what he was saying, and watch Virginia as she talked to Cherry of Dick's prospects, with a look that was no more indifferent than the elaborate politeness of Jack's greeting to Miss Stanforth. She was more self-controlled, but she missed no word or look. But if Cheriton had played a trick on his brother, he himself received a startling surprise when Mr. and Mrs. Rupert Lester were announced. "You cannot avoid meeting your cousins" was as true as his excuse to Alvar; but he could not help feeling himself watched; and as for Ruth, her brilliant, expressive face showed a consciousness which perhaps she hardly meant to conceal from him as she looked at him with all the past in

her eyes. Ruth liked excitement, and the situation was not quite disagreeable to her; but while her look thrilled Cheriton through and through, the fact that she could give it, broke the last thread of his bondage to her. She made him feel with a curious revulsion that Rupert was his own cousin, and that she had tried to make him forget that she was his cousin's wife; and as, being a man, he attributed far too distinct a meaning to the glance of an excitable, sentimental girl, it repelled him, though the pain of the repulsion was perhaps as keen as any that she had made him suffer. He did not betray himself, and it was left to Jack to frown like a thunder-cloud.

When Cheriton came out of the dining-room, Nettie pursued him into a corner, and began abruptly,—

"Cherry, I want to speak to you. When Jack went to Spain did he tell you anything about me?"

"Nothing that I recollect especially," said Cherry, surprised.

"Well, I am going to tell you about it.

Mind, I think I was perfectly right, and Jack ought to have known I should be."

"Have you and Jack had a quarrel, then?"

"Yes," said Nettie, standing straight upright, and making her communication as she looked down on Cherry, as he sat on a low chair. "*I* taught Dick to pass his examination."

"You!"

"Yes. You know he wouldn't work at anything, and I used to make him come and say his lessons to me—the kings of England, you know, and the rivers, and populations, and French verbs. Well, then, if he didn't know them, I made him learn them till he did. But of course he didn't wish any one to know, so we had to get up early, and sit in the hay-loft, or down by the bridge. I could not help the boys knowing that Dick and I went out together, and at last Jack found us in Clements' hay-loft. Dick ran away, but Jack was very angry with me, and insulted me; and Cherry—he went and told papa, and they sent me to London. But I never told the reason, because I had pro-

mised Dick. Now, Cherry, wouldn't it have been very wrong to give up the chance of doing Dick good because Jack chose to be ridiculous? It just made him succeed, and perhaps he will owe it to me that he is a respectable person, and earns his living. *You* would have helped him, wouldn't you?"

"Why, yes," said Cherry; "but that is not quite the same thing."

"Because I am a girl. Cherry, I think it would be mean to have let that stop me. But now he is through, I shall never do it again, of course; and, Cherry, indeed I meant it just as if he had been a ploughboy."

Here Nettie hung her tall head, and her tone grew less defiant.

"But, after all, Nettie, you should not have done what you knew granny and father would not like," said Cherry, much puzzled what to say to her.

"It was because papa never knew that I told *you*," said Nettie rapidly.

Cheriton asked a few more questions, and elicited that Nettie had, very early in their intimacy, taken upon herself the reform of

Dick, and had domineered over him with all the force of a strong will over a weak one. Nettie had acted in perfect good faith, and had defied her brother's attack on her; but as the lessons went on, her instinct had taught her that Dick found her attractive, and came to learn to please himself, not her. The girl had all the self-confidence of her race, and having set her mind on what she called "doing good" to Dick, she defied her own consciousness of his motives, having begun in kindness dashed with considerable contempt. But lazy Dick had powers of his own, and by the time of her quarrel with Jack, Nettie had felt herself on dangerous ground. "I shan't marry—no one is like our boys," she said to herself; but there was just a little traitorous softening and an indefinite sense of wrong-doing which had made her seek absolution from Cheriton, and with the peculiar absence of folly, which was a marked characteristic of the slow-thinking twins, she gave herself the protection of his knowledge.

Cheriton's impulse was to take up Jack's

line and give her a good scolding, but he was touched by her appeal, and had learned to weigh his words carefully. He said something rather lame and inadequate about being more particular in future, but he gave Nettie's hand a kind little squeeze, and she felt herself off her own mind. It had been a curious incident, and had done much to make Nettie into a woman—too much of a woman to look on her *protégé* with favouring eyes. Dick, too, was likely to find other interests, but Nettie had helped to give him a fair start, and her scorn of his old faults could never be quite forgotten.

CHAPTER XL.

A NEW SUGGESTION.

"Once remember
You devoted soul and mind
To the welfare of your brethren
And the service of your kind,
Now what sorrow can you comfort?"

Soon after the scenes recorded in the last chapter, Alvar received a letter from Mrs. Lester, in which she thanked him, in a dignified and cordial manner, for his proposal that the home at Oakby should go on as usual, but said she did not consider that her residence there would be for the happiness of any one. During her son's married life she had lived in a house at Ashrigg, which was part of the Lester property, and was called The Rigg. This was now again vacant, and she proposed to take it, making

it a home for Nettie, and for any of her grandsons who chose so to consider it. The great sorrow of her dear son's death would be more endurable to her, she said, anywhere but at Oakby. The neighbourhood of the Hubbards would provide friends for herself and society for Nettie, who would be very lonely at Oakby in her brothers' constant absences. Alvar was sincerely sorry. He was accustomed to the idea of a family home being open to all, and did not, in any way, regard himself as trammelled by his grandmother's presence there, while Cheriton was utterly taken by surprise, and hated the additional change and uprooting. He did not think the step unwise, especially as regarded Nettie, but he marvelled at his grandmother's energy in devising and resolving on it. He had expected a great outcry from Nettie, but she proved not to be unprepared, and said briefly, "that she liked it better than staying at home *now*."

"But you will not desert me?" said Alvar. "Shall I drive you too away from your home?"

"No," said Cherry. "No, I'll come home for the holidays, and the boys, too, if you will have them; though I suppose granny will want to see us all sometimes."

"I wish that I could take you home now," said Alvar. "I think you are tired with London—you see too many people."

Cheriton coloured a little at the allusion, but he disclaimed any wish to leave London then, shrinking indeed from breaking through the externals of his profession. It ended by Alvar going down to meet his grandmother at Oakby, and to make arrangements for the change, during which he proved himself so kind, courteous, and helpful to her, that he quite won her heart; and Nettie, on her return, was astonished at hearing Alvar's judgment deferred to, and "my grandson" quoted as an authority, on several occasions.

Jack, after a few days in London, joined a reading party for the first weeks of the vacation; and Bob, on his return from the gentleman who was combining for him the study of farming and of polite literature, joined Nettie in London, and took her down

to Ashrigg; so that the early part of August found only Cheriton and Alvar at Oakby.

Cherry liked this well enough, for though the house could not but seem forlorn and empty to him, daily life was always pleasant with Alvar, and he would have gladly helped him through all the arrears of business that came to hand. These were considerable, for Mr. Lester's subordinates had not been trained to go alone, and none of them had been allowed universal superintendence. Cheriton thought that Alvar required such assistance, and that he ought to have an agent with more authority; but oddly enough he did not take to the proposal, and in the meantime he made mistakes, kept decisions waiting, failed to recognize the relative importance of different matters, and, still worse, of different people.

One afternoon, towards the end of August, Cheriton went over to Elderthwaite. What with business at home, expeditions to Ashrigg, and a great many calls on his attention from more immediate neighbours, he had not seen very much of the parson, and as he

neared the rectory he beheld an unwonted sight in the field adjoining, namely, some thirty or forty children drinking tea, under the superintendence of Virginia and one of the Miss Ellesmeres.

"Hallo, Cherry," said the parson, advancing to meet him; "where have you been? Seems to me we must have a grand —what d'ye call it?—rural collation before we can get a sight of you."

"As you never invited me to the rural collation, I was not aware of its existence," said Cherry laughing, as Virginia approached him.

"Oh, Cherry, stay and start some games," she said. "You know they are so ignorant, they never even saw a school-feast before."

"Then, Virginia, I wonder at you for spoiling the last traces of such refreshing simplicity. Introducing juvenile dissipation! Well, it doesn't seem as if the natural child wanted much training to appreciate plum-cake!"

"No; but if you could make the boys run for halfpence—"

"You think they won't know a halfpenny when they see one."

"Do have some tea!" said Lucy Ellesmere, running up to him. "Perhaps you are tired, and Virginia has given them *beautiful* tea, and really they're very nice children, *considering*."

So Cherry stayed, and advanced the education of the Elderthwaite youth by teaching them to bob for cherries, and other arts of polite society, ending by showing them how to give three cheers for the parson, and three times three for Miss Seyton; and while Virginia was dismissing her flock with final hunches of gingerbread, the parson called him into the house.

"Poor lassie!" he said; "she is fond of the children, and thinks a great deal of doing them good; but it's little good she can do in the face of what's coming."

"How do you mean?" said Cheriton. "Is anything specially amiss?"

"Come in and have a pipe. A glass of wine won't come amiss after so much tea and gingerbread."

They went into the dining-room, and the parson poked up the fire into a blaze, for even August afternoons were not too warm at Elderthwaite for a fire to be pleasant, and as he subsided into his arm-chair, he said gravely,—

"Eh, Cherry, we Seytons have been a bad lot—a bad lot—and the end of it 'll be we shall be kicked out of the country."

"Oh, I hope not!" said Cherry, quite sincerely. "What is the matter?"

"Well, look round about you. Is there a wall that's mended, or a plantation preserved as it ought to be? Look at the timber—what is there left of it? and what's felled lies rotting on the ground for want of carting. There's acres of my brother's hay never was led till the rain came and spoiled it. Look at the cottages. Queenie gets the windows mended, but she can't make the roofs water-tight. Look at those woods down by the stream, why, there's not a head of game in them, and once they were the best preserves in the country!"

"Things are bad, certainly," said Cherry.

"And yet, Cherry, we've loved the place, and never have sold an acre of it, spite of mortgages and everything. Well, my brother's not long for this world. He has been failing and failing before his time, and though he has led a decent life enough, things have gone more to the bad with years of doing nothing, than with all the scandals of my father's time."

"Is Mr. Seyton ill?" said Cheriton.

"Not ill altogether; but mark my words, he'll not last long. Well, at last, he was so hard up that he wrote to Roland—and I know, Cheriton, it was the bitterest pill he ever swallowed—and asked his consent to selling Uplands Farm. What does Roland do but write back and say, with all his heart; so soon as it came into his hands he should sell every acre, house and lands, advowson of living and all, and pay his debts. He hated the place, he said, and would never live there. Sell it to the highest bidder. There were plenty of fortunes made in trade, says he, that would give anything for land and position. So there, the old place 'll go

into the hands of some purse-proud stranger. But not the church—he shan't go restoring and improving that with his money. I'm only fifty-nine, and a good life yet, and I'll stick in the church till I'm put into the churchyard!"

Cherry smiled, it was impossible to help it; but the parson's story made him very sad. He knew well enough that it was a righteous retribution, that Roland's ownership would be a miserable thing for every soul in Elderthwaite, and that the most purse-proud of strangers would do something to mend matters; and yet his heart ached at the downfall, and his quick imagination pictured vividly how completely the poor old parson would put himself in the wrong, and what a disastrous state of things would be sure to ensue.

"I'd try and not leave so much 'restoration' for any stranger to do," he said.

"Eh, what's the good?" said the parson. "She had better let it alone for the 'new folks.'"

"Nay," said Cherry, "you cannot tell if the 'new folks,' as you call them, will be

inclined for anything of the sort, and all these changes may not take place for years. It doesn't quite pay to do nothing because life is rather more uncertain to oneself than to other people."

Cheriton spoke half to himself, and the parson went on with his own train of thought.

"Ay, I'll stick to the old place, though I thought it a heavy clog round my neck once; and if you knew all the ins and outs of that transaction, you'd say, maybe, I ought to be kicked out of it now."

"No, I should not," said Cherry, who knew, perhaps, more of the Elderthwaite traditions than the parson imagined. "Things are as they are, and not as they might have been, and perhaps you could do more than any one else to mend matters."

The parson looked into the fire, with an odd, half humble, half comical expression, and Cherry said abruptly,—

"Do you think Mr. Seyton would sell Uplands to me?"

"To you? What the dickens do you want with it?"

"Why—I don't think it would be a bad speculation, and I should like, I think, to have it."

"What? Does your brother make Oakby too hot to hold you?"

"No, indeed. He is all that is kind to me," said Cherry indignantly. "Every one misconstrues him. But I should like to have a bit of land hereabouts, all the same."

"Well, you had better ask my brother yourself. He may think himself lucky, for I don't know who would buy a bit of land like that wedged in between the two places. Ah, here's Queenie to say good-night. Well, my lassie, are you pleased with your sport?"

"Yes, uncle; and the children were very good."

Cheriton walked a little way with Virginia, beyond the turning where they parted from Lucy Ellesmere. He found that she was unaware of the facts which the parson had told him, and though somewhat uneasy about her father, very much disposed to dwell on the good accounts of Dick and Harry, and on the general awakening in

the place that seemed to demand improvements. Oakby offered a ready-made pattern, and other farmers had been roused by Mr. Clements to wish for changes, while some, of course, were ready to oppose them.

"They begin to wish Uncle James would have a curate, Cherry," she said; "but I don't think he ever will find one that he could get on with. No one who did not know all the ins and outs of the place could get on either with him or with the people."

"It would be difficult," said Cheriton thoughtfully; "yet I do believe that a great deal might be done for parson as well as people."

"Ah, Cherry," said Virginia, with a smile, "if you hadn't got another vocation, Uncle James would let *you* do anything you liked. I wish *you* were a clergyman, and could come and be curate of Elderthwaite; for you are the only person who could fit into all the corners."

Virginia spoke in jest, as of an impossible vision, but Cheriton answered her with unexpected seriousness.

"It would be hard on Elderthwaite to put up with a failure, and an offering would not be worth much which one had waited to make till one had nothing left worth giving; I'm afraid, too, my angles are less accommodating than you suppose—ask Alvar."

Cherry finished his sentence thoughtlessly, and was recalled by Virginia's blush; but she said as they parted, "That is a safe reference for you."

Cheriton laughed; but as he walked homeward he turned and looked back on the tumble-down, picturesque village at his feet. Loud, rough sounds of a noisy quarrel in the little street came to his ears, and some boys passed him manifestly the worse for drink, though they pulled themselves up and tried to avoid his notice. It was not quite a new idea which Virginia had put into shape; but as the steep hill forced him to slacken his steps, he could not see that the strength which had proved insufficient for a more selfish object was likely to be worth consecrating to the service of his neighbours.

CHAPTER XLI.

A NEW AMBITION.

"Like a young courtier of the king's—like the king's young courtier."

In the first week of September Jack came home, and Bob also came over from Ashrigg to assist in demolishing the partridges. The empty, lonely house affected the spirits of the two lads in a way neither of them had foreseen; the unoccupied drawing-room, the absence of Nettie's rapid footsteps, the freedom from their grandmother's strictures on dress and deportment—all seemed strange and unnatural; and when they were not absolutely out shooting, they hung about disconsolately, and grumbled to Cheriton over every little alteration. Jack, indeed, recovered himself after a day or two, but

he looked solemn, and intensified Cherry's sense that things were amiss, strongly disapproving of his principle of non-interference. He contrived, too, whether innocently or not, to ask questions that exposed Alvar's ignorance of the names and qualities of places and people, and betrayed delays in giving orders, misconceptions of requirements, and many a lapse from order and method. Moreover, the way in which some of the excellent old dependents showed their loyalty to the old *régime*, was by doing nothing without orders. Consequently, a hedge remained unmended till the cows got through into a plantation, and ate the tops off the young trees,—"Mr. Lester had given no order on the subject;" and a young horse was thrown down and broke his knees through Mr. Lester desiring the wrong person to exercise him. Then, of two candidates for a situation, Alvar often managed to choose the wrong one, and with the sort of irritability that seemed to be growing on him, would not put up with suggestions.

"What?" said Jack; "one of those poaching, thieving Greens taken on as stable-boy! And Jos, too—the worst of the lot! Why, he has been in prison twice. A nice companion for all the other lads about the place! I saw little Sykes after him this morning. I should have thought you would have stopped *that*, Cherry, at least!"

"I did not know of it, Jack, till too late," said Cherry quietly.

"Well," said Jack, driving his hands into his pockets and frowning fiercely, "I don't think it's right to let such things pass without a protest. Something will happen that cannot be undone. I don't approve of systems by which people's welfare is thrown into the hands of a few; but if they are—if you are those few, it's—it's more criminal than many things of which the law takes cognizance, to neglect their interest. It's destroying the last relics of reality, and bringing the whole social edifice to destruction."

"What I think," said Bob, "is that if a man's a gentleman, and has been accustomed

to see things in a proper point of view, he acts accordingly."

"A gentleman! A man's only claim to be a gentleman is that he recognizes the whole brotherhood of humanity and his duties as a human being."

"Come, I don't know," said Bob, not quite sure where these expressions were leading him.

"His duty to his neighbour," said Cheriton.

"You worry yourself fifty times too much about it all," said Jack, with vehement inconsistency.

"Well, perhaps I do," said Cheriton, glad to turn the conversation. "Come, tell me how you got on in Wales, I have never heard a word of it."

Jack looked at him for a moment, and with something of an effort began to talk about his reading party; but presently he warmed with the topic, and Cherry brightened into animation at the sound of familiar names and former interests; they began to laugh over old jokes, and quarrel over old

subjects of disputation; and they were talking fast and eagerly against each other, with a sort of chorus from Bob, when, looking up, Cherry suddenly saw Alvar standing before them with a letter in his hand.

He was extremely pale, but his eyes blazed with such intensity of wrath, he came up to them with a gesture expressive of such passion, that they all started up; while he burst out,—

"I have to tell you that I am scorned, injured, insulted. My grandfather has died—"

"Your grandfather, Don Guzman? Alvar, I am sorry," exclaimed Cheriton; but Alvar interrupted him,—

"Sorrow insults me! I learn that he has made his will, that he leaves all to Manoel, that *I*—I, his grandson—am not fit to be his heir, 'since I am a foreigner and a heretic, and unfit to be the owner of Spanish property.'"

"That seems very unjust," said Cheriton, as Alvar paused for a moment.

"Unjust!" cried Alvar. "I am the victim of injustice. Here and there—it is

the same thing. I have been silent—yes, yes—but I will not bear it. I will be what I please, myself—there, here, everywhere!"

"Nay, Alvar," said Cherry gently; "*here* at least, you have met with no injustice."

"And why?" cried Alvar, with the sudden abandonment of passion which now and then broke through his composure. "*You* are doubtless too honourable to plot and scheme; but your thoughts and your wishes, are they not the same—the same as this most false and unnatural traitor, who has stolen from me my inheritance and my grandfather's love? What do you wish, my brothers—wish in your hearts—would happen to the intruder, the stranger, who takes your lands from you? Would you not see me dead at your feet?"

"We never wished you were dead," said Bob indignantly, as Alvar walked about the room, threw out his hands with vehement gestures, stamped his foot, and gave way to a violence of expression that would have seemed ludicrous to his brothers but for the fury of passion, which evidently grew with

every moment, as if the injury of years was finding vent. All the strong temper of his father seemed roused and expressed with a rush of vindictive passion, his southern blood and training depriving him at once of self-consciousness and self-control.

"What matter what you wish? Am I not condemned to a life which I abhor, to a place that is hateful to me, despised by one whose feet I would kiss, disliked by you all, insulted by those who should be my slaves? What is this country to me, or I to it? I care not for your laws, your magistrates, your people—who hate me, who would shoot me if they dared. And this—this—has lost me the place where I was as good as others. I lose my home for this—for you who stand together and wonder at me. I curse that villain who has robbed me; I curse the fate that has made me doubly an outlaw; most of all, I curse my father, whose neglect—"

"Silence!" said Cheriton; "you do not speak such words in our presence."

The flood of Alvar's words, half Spanish, half English, had fairly silenced the three

brothers with amazement. Now he faced round furiously on Cheriton,—

"I will speak—"

"You will *not*," said Cheriton, grasping his hand, and looking full in his face. "You forget yourself, Alvar. Don't say what we could never forget or forgive."

But Alvar flung him off with a violence and scorn that roused the two lads to fury, and made Cheriton's own blood tingle as Jack sprang forward,—

"I won't have that," he said, in a tone as low as Alvar's was high, but to the full as threatening.

"I'll give you a licking if you touch my brother," shouted Bob, with a rough, schoolboy enforcement of the threat.

"Hush!" said Cheriton; "for God's sake, stop—all of you! We are not boys now, to threaten each other. Stop, while there is time. Stand back, I say, Jack, and be silent!"

The whole thing had passed in half a minute; Alvar's own furious gesture had sobered him, and he threw himself into a

seat; while Cheriton's steady voice and look controlled the two lads, and gave Jack time to recollect himself.

There was a moment's silence. Then Alvar stood up, bowed haughtily, like a duellist after the encounter, and walked out of the room. Jack, after a minute, broke into an odd, harsh laugh, and, pushing open the window, leant out of it.

"One wants air. That was a critical moment," he said.

"I'll not stand that sort of thing; I'll go back to Ashrigg; I'll not come here again," said Bob. "What did you stop us for, Cherry, when we were going to show him a piece of our minds?"

"I did not think anybody's mind was fit to be exhibited," said Cheriton. "Don't begin to quarrel with me too, Bob; and do not go away to-day on any account."

"Well!" said Bob; "if you like such a hollow peace—but I'll not shoot his partridges, nor ride his horses; I'll go for a walk, and I shan't come in to dinner!"

Bob flung out of the room, banging the door behind him.

At first the other two hardly spoke a word to each other. Cherry sat down a little apart, and mechanically took up a newspaper. Jack sat in the window, and as his heat subsided, thought over the scene that had passed. He felt that it was more than a foolish outburst of violent temper; it had been a revelation to themselves and to each other of a state of feeling that it seemed to him impossible any longer to ignore. He knew that Cheriton's presence of mind had saved them from words and actions that might have parted them for ever; but what was the use of pretending to get on with Alvar after such a deadly breach? Better leave him to do the best he could in his own way, and go theirs. And Jack's thoughts turned to his own way in the future that he hoped for, success and congenial labour, and sweet love to brighten it. After all, a man's early home was not everything to him. And then he looked towards Cheriton, who had dropped his newspaper, and sat looking dreamily before

him, with a sad look of disappointment on his face.

"What are you going to do, Cherry?" said Jack.

"Do? Nothing. What can I do?" said Cherry. Then he added, "We must not make too much of what passed to-day; let us all try and forget it. Alvar has been ill-treated, and we are none of us so gentle as not to know what a little additional Spanish fire might make of us."

"To be rough with you!" said Jack.

"Oh, that was accidental. It is the terrible resentment. There, I did not mean to speak of it. Let us get out into the air, and shake it off."

"It is too wet and cold for you," said Jack, looking out.

Cheriton flushed at the little check with an impatience that showed how hardly the scene had borne on him.

"Nonsense; don't be fanciful," he said. "It won't hurt me—what if it did?"

Jack followed him in silence, and as they walked Cherry talked resolutely of other

matters, though with long pauses of silence between.

In the meantime Alvar endured an agony of self-disgust. He could not forgive himself for his loss of dignity, nor his brothers for having witnessed it. Cheriton had conquered him, and the thought rankled so as to obscure even the love he bore him; while all the bitter and vindictive feelings, never recognized as sinful, took possession of him, and held undisputed sway. He was enough of an Englishman to reject his first impulse of rushing back to Seville and calling out his cousin and fighting him. After all, the bitterness was here; and at dinner-time he appeared silent and sullen in manner. Cheriton looked ill and tired, and could hardly eat; but Alvar offered no remark on it, and the younger boys (for Bob did come back) were shy and embarrassed. Alvar answered when Cheriton addressed him with a sort of stiff politeness, and by the next morning had resumed a more ordinary demeanour; but when Bob again suggested going back to Ashrigg, Cheriton and Jack

agreed that he had better do so, only charging him not to let Nettie or their grandmother guess at any quarrel.

"And, Cherry," Jack said, "suppose we come somewhere together for a little while? A little sea air would do you good—and you could help me with my reading. No one could think it strange, and I am sure you want rest and quiet."

"No, Jack," said Cherry. "It is very good of you, my boy, but—I'll try a little longer. Alvar and I could not come together again if I went away now, and I'll not give up hoping that after all things may right themselves. Think of all he has been to me. But you must do as you think best yourself."

"I shall not leave you here without me," said Jack; "but I don't see the use of staying."

"Well—I shall stay," said Cherry.

Alvar never alluded again to his letter from Spain; and the others were afraid to start the subject. He was very polite to them, and together they formed engagements, went over to Ashrigg, and led their

lives in the usual manner; but there was no real approach, and Cheriton missed Alvar's caressing tenderness, and the tact that had always been exercised on his behalf.

He did not, with all this worry, find as much strength to face the coming winter as he had hoped for, and while he thought that going back to London would put an end to the present discomfort, he believed that he would do no good there; and would not a parting from Alvar now be a real separation?

Alvar, meanwhile, took a fit of attending to business. He spent much time about the place, insisted on being consulted on all subjects, and still more on being instantly obeyed; king Log had vanished, and a very peremptory king Stork appeared in his place. The gentle, courteous, indifferent Alvar seemed possessed with a captious and resentful spirit that brooked no opposition. No one had ever dared to disobey Mr. Lester's orders; but then they had been given with a due regard to possibility, and often after consultation with those by whom they were to be obeyed.

Alvar now proved himself to be equally determined; but he was often ignorant of what was reasonable and of what was not, and though the sturdy north countrymen had given in against their inclination to their superior, they thought it very hard to be driven against their judgment when they were right and "t' strange squire" was wrong, or at least innovating. Now Alvar did know something about horses, and his views of stable management differed somewhat from those prevailing at Oakby, and being based on the experience of a different climate and different conditions, were not always applicable there, and could only of course be carried, as it were, at the sword's point.

Full of this new and intense desire to feel himself master, and to prove himself so, Alvar not unnaturally concentrated his efforts on the one subject where he had something to say. He *could* not lay down the law about turnips and wheat; but he did think that he knew best how to treat the injuries the young horse had received by his own mistaken order.

Perhaps he did; but so did not think old Bill Fisher, who had been about the stables ever since he was twelve, and who, though past much active work, still considered himself an authority from which there was no appeal.

Alvar visited the horse, and desired a certain remedy to be applied to a sprained shoulder, taking some trouble to explain how it was to be made.

Old Bill listened in an evil silence, and instead of saying that so far as he knew one of the ingredients was unattainable at Oakby, or giving his master an alternative, said nothing at all in reply to Alvar's imperious—"Remember, this must be done at once;" but happening soon after to encounter Cheriton, requested him to visit the horse, and desired his opinion of the proper treatment.

Cheriton, ignorant of what had passed, naturally quoted the approved remedy at Oakby, adding,—

"Why, Bill, I should have thought you would have known that for yourself."

"Ay, no one ever heard tell of no other," muttered the old man, proceeding to apply it with some grumbling about strangers, which Cheriton afterwards bitterly rued having turned a deaf ear to.

The next morning Alvar went to see if his plans had been carried out, and discovering how his orders had been disregarded, turned round, and said sternly,—

"How have you dared to disobey me?"

"Eh, sir," said Bill, rather appalled at his master's face, "this stuff's cured our horses these fifty year."

"You have disobeyed me," said Alvar, "and I will not suffer it. I dismiss you from my service—you may go. I will not forgive you."

Old Bill lifted up his bent figure, and stared at his master in utter amaze.

"I served your honour's grandfather—me and mine," he said.

"You cannot obey me. What are your wages? I will pay them—you may go."

Neither the old man himself, nor the helpers who had begun to gather round,

belonged to a race of violent words, or indeed of violent deeds; but there was more hate in the faces that were turned on Alvar than would have winged many an Irish bullet. All were silent, till a little brother of Cherry's friends, the Flemings, called out, saucily enough,—

"'Twas Mr. Cherry's orders."

As if stung beyond endurance, Alvar turned, caught the boy by the shoulder, and raising his cane, struck him once, twice, several times, with a violence of which he himself was hardly conscious.

This was the scene that met Cheriton's startled eyes as he came up to the stable to inquire for the sick horse.

He uttered a loud exclamation of astonishment and dismay, and put his hand on Alvar's shoulder.

Alvar, with a final blow, threw the lad away from him, and faced round on Cheriton, drew himself up, and folded his arms, as he said, regardless of the spectators,—

"I will not have it that you interfere with me, to alter my orders, or to stop me in what I do. You shall not do it."

"I have never interfered with you!" cried Cheriton fiercely. "Assuredly I never will. I—I—" He checked himself with a strong effort, and said, very low, "We are forgetting ourselves by disputing here. If you have anything to say to me, it can be said at a better moment."

Then, without trusting himself with a word or look, he walked slowly away.

Alvar said emphatically,—

"Remember, I have said what I desire," and turned off in another direction; while those left behind held such an "indignation meeting" as Oakby had never seen.

CHAPTER XLII.

NO USE.

"Learn that each duty makes its claim
Upon one soul, not each on all;
How if God speaks thy brother's name,
Dare thou make answer to the call?"

CHERITON had encountered greater sorrows, he had met with more startling disappointments, but never, perhaps, had he endured such a complication of feeling as when he turned away and left Alvar in the stable yard. Perhaps he had never been so angry, for Alvar's accusation was peculiarly galling, peculiarly hard to forgive, and impossible to forget. And then there was the bitter sense of utter failure—failure of influence, of tact, of affection, and, in so far as he identified himself with the place and the people, there was yet a deeper sense of injury. Every old

prejudice, every old distaste, surged up in his mind, and yet he loved Alvar well enough to sharpen the sting. He walked on faster and faster, till want of breath stopped him, and brought on one of the fits of coughing to which overhaste or agitation always rendered him liable. He just managed to get back to the house and into the library, where Jack started up, as he threw himself into a chair.

"Cherry, what *is* the matter?"

Cherry could not speak for a moment; and Jack, much frightened, exclaimed,—

"What *have* you been doing? Let me call Alvar."

Cheriton caught his arm as he turned away; and, after a few moments, as he began to get his breath,—

"Don't be frightened. I walked too fast up hill."

"How could you be so foolish?"

"Jack, I suppose I must tell you; indeed, I want to find out the rights of it; and *I* can ask no questions," he added, with a sudden hurry in his accent.

"What do you mean? What has happened?"

The instinct of not irritating Jack enabled Cheriton to control his own indignation, and he said very quietly,—

"When I went up to the stable I found Alvar giving little Chris Fleming a tremendous licking. He was very much vexed with me for—I suppose for trying to interpose; but there were so many people about that we could not discuss it there. I wish you would go and ask old Bill what Chris had been doing, then come and tell me. Don't say anything to Alvar about it."

Jack was keen enough to see that this was not quite an adequate account of the matter. He saw that Cheriton was deeply moved in some way; but he was so unfit for discussion just then, that Jack thought the best course was to hurry off on his errand.

He came back in about half-an-hour, looking very serious—too much so to be ready to improve the occasion.

"Alvar has given old Bill warning—do you know that?"

"*No.* What was that for?" cried Cheriton, starting up.

"He would not speak a word to me, and Chris had gone off to his brother's; but John Symonds told me what had passed." Here Jack repeated the story of the ointment, old Bill's disobedience, and Chris's declaration that it had been done by Cheriton's orders.

Cheriton's face cleared a little.

"Ah, I understand now. No wonder Alvar was vexed! I can explain that easily. But old Bill, it *was* very unjustifiable; but if Alvar will not overlook it I do believe it will kill him."

"I don't see what he would have to live on," said Jack. "You know that bad son spent his savings. But Alvar will let him off if you ask him, I daresay."

"I think you had better do so," said Cheriton quietly.

At this moment Alvar came into the room, and Cheriton addressed him at once.

"Alvar, when old Bill asked me about the ointment, I did not know that you had been

giving any orders about it. I am very sorry for the mistake."

"It is not of consequence," said Alvar. "Do not trouble yourself about it."

The words were kind, but the tone was less so; and there was something in Alvar's manner which made it difficult even for Jack to say,—

"I'm afraid old Bill Fisher was provoking. He should have told you that he could not get the stuff; but he is such an old servant, and so faithful. I hope you won't dismiss him for it. He seems to belong to us altogether."

"I shall not change," said Alvar.

"But it's an extremely harsh measure, and will make every one about the place detest you," said Jack, still considering himself to be speaking with praiseworthy moderation.

"I will judge myself of the measure."

Then Cherry conquered his pride, and said pleadingly,—

"I wish it very much."

"I am sorry to grieve you," said Alvar, more gently; "but I have determined."

"Well," said Jack, losing patience, "we spoke as much for your sake as for Bill's. Every one will consider it harsh dealing and a great shame. You'll make them hate you."

"I will make them fear me," said Alvar.

"Claptrap and nonsense!" said Jack; but Cheriton interposed,—

"Hush, Jack, we have no right to say any more. What must be must."

To do Alvar justice, he was not aware how deeply he was grieving Cheriton; he felt himself to be asserting his rights, and in the worst corner of his heart knew that any relenting would be ascribed to his brother's influence.

It was a very miserable day. After some hours of astonished sulking, the poor old groom put his pride in his pocket, and came humbly "to beg t' squire's pardon," and to entreat Cheriton to intercede for him, recapitulating his years of long service, and his recollections of the old squire's boyhood, till he nearly broke Cherry's heart; and induced him to promise to make another

attempt at interceding—a promise which was not given without quite as severe a rebuke as Alvar had ever inflicted, for disrespect to his master's orders.

He was closely followed by the eldest of the Fleming brothers, in great indignation.

Nowhere but at Oakby, as the young man took care to observe, would Chris have been allowed to take such a situation, in spite of his love of horses, and troublesomeness at home.

"Chris was impertinent to Mr. Lester," said Cheriton, hardly knowing what line to take.

Young Fleming was very sorry; in that case he was better at home, and he hoped it would not be inconvenient if he took him away at once.

"I suppose it might be best," said Cheriton, thoroughly sympathizing with the grievance, and thankful to Fleming for not obliging him to hear or say much about it.

"Then, sir, maybe you will tell the squire that such is our wish."

"No; I think you had better write him a note about it."

The two young men looked at each other,

and though Cheriton turned his eyes quickly away, he knew well enough that Fleming understood the whole matter.

"As you please, sir," he said; "I wouldn't wish for *you* to be annoyed, Mr. Cherry, and *so* I'll keep out of the squire's way. But Westmoreland men are not black slaves, which no doubt the squire is accustomed to, and accounts for his conduct. It's plain, sir, to any one that can read the newspapers, that there's no liberty in foreign parts, where they're all slaves and papists. Education, sir, teaches us that. And folks do remark that the squire doesn't keep his church as others do; and I *have* heard that he means to establish a Popish chapel like the one at Ravenscroft."

"Then you have heard the greatest piece of nonsense that ever was invented. Education might cure you of such notions," said Cherry. "You must do as you think best for Chris. I am very sorry."

The last words were involuntary, and Cherry hurried away before he was betrayed into any further discussion.

Some hours later, as it was growing dusk, he was lying on the window-seat in the library, thinking of how he could plead old Fisher's cause without giving offence, and coming slowly to the conclusion that his presence there was doing far more harm than good, that he was risking peace with Alvar, and had better give up the struggle, when Alvar himself came into the room, and came up to him.

"Are you not well?" he said, rather constrainedly.

"Only very tired."

"What have you been doing?" said Alvar, sitting down on the end of the broad-cushioned seat, and looking at him.

The words certainly gave an opening; but Cheriton, famous all his life for the most audacious coaxing, could not summon a smile or a joke.

"I have been tired all day," he said, to gain time for reflection.

"See," said Alvar suddenly, "you are unhappy about this old man, whom I have dismissed."

"Yes. I don't defend him, far from it; but he is old and crochety, and I think you were harsh with him," said Cherry resolutely.

"But it is I who should decide what to do with him," said Alvar.

"Of course. Don't imagine I dispute it," said Cheriton, thinking this assertion rather foolish.

"You tell me that I should be master; you have told me so often. Well, then, I can be harsh to my servants if I please."

"If you please, remembering that you and they serve the same Master above."

Alvar paused for a moment, then said,—

"I do not please, at present. I have grieved you, as when I hurt Buffer. I will not be ruled by any one, but the old man shall live in his cottage, and have his wages; but he shall not come into the stables nor near my horses. Does that please you, my brother?"

Cherry had his doubts as to how old Bill might regard or fulfil the conditions, and certainly forbidding a servant to do any

work was rather an odd way of punishing him; but he answered gratefully,—

"Yes, thank you, you have taken a great weight off my mind."

"You cough," said Alvar, after a few moments; "the weather is getting too cold for you."

"I thought," said Cherry, forcing himself to take advantage of the excuse, "that I would go to the sea for a little while before the winter."

"Yes; where shall we go?" said Alvar, in a tone of interest. "Look," he continued, with wonderful candour; "here we vex each other because we do not think the same. We are angry with each other; but we will come away, and I will take care of you. Then you shall go to London, and I shall come back, and you will see, I will yet be the squire. Where shall we go, *mi caro?*"

It was almost a dismissal, and so Cheriton felt it to be; but after all it was his own decision, and the return of Alvar's old kindness was very comfortable to him.

"I had hardly thought about that," he said.

"Well," returned Alvar, "we can talk about it. Now, it is cold here in the window; come nearer to the fire and rest till dinner-time."

As Cheriton sat up and looked out at the stormy sunset, he saw little Chris Fleming coming up the path that led round to the back door.

"Ah," said Alvar cheerfully, following his eyes, "I do not wish to punish that boy any more. He has had enough, that little rascal."

Evidently, Alvar's conscience was quite at ease, and he did not suppose that he had in any way compromised himself. He began to perceive that Alvar had his own ideas as to what would make him really master of Oakby.

Just after dinner a note was brought to Alvar.

"If you please, sir, this note was found in the passage, just inside the back door."

Alvar took the letter, lit one of the candles

on the chimney-piece, and proceeded to read it.

"MOOR END FARM, *Sept. 29th.*

"HONOURED SIR,—After the events of this morning, I consider it for the best that my brother Christopher should leave your service at once. I have no objection to forfeit any wages due to him, as I do not feel able to give the usual month's notice after what has passed.

"I remain, honoured sir,

"Your obedient servant,

"EDWARD FLEMING."

Alvar coloured deeply as he read. "What is this?" he exclaimed. "May I not punish even a little boy, who insults me? Look!" and he threw the letter to his brother.

"It is very awkward," said Cheriton.

"I think it is insolent," said Alvar.

"I think there is a great effort to avoid any want of respect in the letter."

"To take the boy away because he was punished!"

"Well, Alvar, if you or I were in Ned Fleming's place, we shouldn't have liked it."

"Did you know that this letter was coming?"

"Yes, I did."

"It is perhaps as you have advised Fleming?"

"No. I gave him no advice; but I knew he would not let the boy stay here."

"Do you then approve?" said Alvar, in a curious sort of voice.

"From their point of view—yes. You are right in saying that you must make yourself felt as the master; but there is no good in enforcing your authority in a way that is not customary, to say the least of it. In England we can't lay hands on other people; and they *might* have summoned you for an assault, you know."

"What! before a judge?"

"Before a magistrate."

"I?" exclaimed Alvar, in a tone of such amazement that Cheriton nearly laughed. "Who would listen to that little boy against me, who am a gentleman and his master?"

"The little boy is your equal in the eyes of the law, and might meet with more attention just because you *are* his master. Not that I mean to say it would not be regarded as very annoying to convict you,"

said Cheriton, thinking of the feelings of Sir John Hubbard on such an emergency.

"I will myself be a magistrate," said Alvar.

"That you never will," said Cherry, losing patience, "while these stories get about, for no one would trust you."

"Can I not be a magistrate if I choose?"

"Not unless the Lord Lieutenant gives you a commission, of course."

"I think there is power for every one but me!" said Alvar. "I may not punish that little—what is your word?—vulgar, common boy. I do not like so much law. Gentlemen should do as they wish. You talk so much about my being landlord and squire. What is the use of it if I may not do as I will? Well, I will send away Fleming from his farm—that is mine at least."

"I am afraid he has a twenty-one years lease in it," said Cheriton, rather wickedly, and Alvar, fancying himself laughed at, suddenly put the letter in his pocket and turned away, as the gong sounded for dinner. He disappeared afterwards when they went

back to the library, and Cheriton had the forbearance to abstain from giving Jack the benefit of Alvar's peculiar views on the British constitution, though they could not fail to speak of the events of the morning, and Jack said,—

"Well, at least he has heard reason about old Bill, and that was of most consequence; but I should think you would be glad to be back in London, and out of the way of it all."

"I am not quite sure about London, Jack," said Cheriton, after a moment.

"What, don't you feel well enough?"

"I don't think I shall ever be good for much there; and besides—I think I should like to talk to you a little, Jack, if you'll listen."

"Well?"

"You know how I always looked forward to settling in London, and how Uncle Cheriton wished it, and meant to help me on. In fact I never thought of anything else."

"Yes, I know," said Jack, briefly.

"There was a time when I desired that

sort of success intensely, and when things were very much changed for me, I thought it would still—be satisfactory."

"Yes?"

"But of course, as you know, I soon perceived that the hard continuous work, necessary for anything like success, was quite out of the question for me—I feel sure that it always will be; and, moreover, I never felt well in London. I was much better here when I first came back."

Poor Jack looked as if the disappointment were much fresher and harder to him than to the speaker himself.

"You must know," Cheriton continued, "that a doctor once told me at Oxford that the damp soft air there was very bad for a native of such a place as this, and I see now that the last few months there began the mischief; and London has something the same effect on me. That seems to settle the question."

"I suppose so," said Jack, so disconsolately, that Cherry half smiled, as he resumed,—

"Otherwise the pleasant idle life there might have its charms. Though, after all, Jack, I shouldn't like it as things are now. When I expected to be a London man, I expected, as you know—a good deal else. And afterwards even, while all home ties here were safe and sound, one would not get selfish and aimless. But now I couldn't be happy, I think, without a home-world that really belonged to me."

"And so home is being spoilt for you too?" said Jack.

"I see," returned Cheriton, that it won't do. If Alvar is left to himself here, he will fight his way now, I think, to some means of managing proper to himself."

"Or improper," said Jack.

"Well, to be honest, I am afraid he will make a great many mistakes, and do a great deal of mischief. But if I were here—I mean if this place were still to be home to me so that I still felt—as I should feel— a personal concern in all the old interests, Alvar would quarrel with me. I might prevent individual evils; but in the long run I

should do harm. He thought at first that I should guide him. Perhaps I thought so too; but it is a false and impossible relation, and it must be put a stop to."

"But, Cherry, I think father looked to you to keep things straight."

"Yes," said Cherry, "but not to make them more crooked, by such disputes as we have had lately."

Cheriton spoke resolutely, though with a quiver of the lip, and Jack could guess well enough at the pain the resolve was costing him. "Alvar is quite changed to you!" he said, savagely.

"Yes, because he himself is changing. He is different in many ways, and conscious of all sorts of difficulties."

"But what do you mean to do?"

"Oh, nothing desperate, nothing till the winter is over. Probably I shall go to the sea with Alvar, as he suggests. Then if I am pretty well, I shall go and see granny. I have a notion that I should be better here in the cold weather than in London. I want to try."

"Had you all this in your mind when you settled to buy Uplands?" said Jack suddenly.

"Yes—in part I had."

"But, you are not thinking of living *there!* What are you driving at, Cherry, I can't understand you?"

"Well, Jack," said Cherry, slowly and with rising colour, "I will tell you, but I wanted to show you the process. And you must remember that it is only an idea known to no one, and very probably may prove impossible, perhaps undesirable."

"Tell me," said Jack, more gently. Any scheme for the future was a relief from listening to the laying aside of hopes which he knew had been so much a part of Cheriton's being.

"Well," said Cherry again, "I'm afraid my motives are rather poor ones. You see, after Oakby there's no place for me like Elderthwaite. I want the feeling, as I say, of a place and neighbours of my own. I suppose I am used to playing first fiddle, and to looking after other people's concerns. Granny always said I was a gossip. Then

I'm narrow-minded, perhaps I have had too much taken out of me to think of starting fresh. And you know the old parson will always put up with me, and so will Elderthwaite people. And I want an object in life —if you knew how dreary it is to be without one! If they had a strange curate he would set them all by the ears, and the parson would make a fool of himself! So if Mr. Ellesmere thinks the bishop would consent, and approves, and if I am fit for anything, I thought that I would try."

Jack was silent for some moments. He understood Cheriton well enough to "follow the process," but it affected him strongly, and at last he said, gravely,—

"I am afraid all the vexation here has put this into your head."

"Partly," said Cherry, simply, "this actual thing. I can't say anything of other motives of course, Jack. I know that it looks like, that in fact it *is* turning to this—which ought to be the offering of all one's best—when other careers have failed me. And I know that those who sympathize the

least will be the most inclined to say so. But it is not quite so. I *have* always wished to be of use, of service, here especially. I thought I saw how. I have the same wish still, and this seems to offer me a way. It is but a gathering up of the fragments, but I trust He will accept."

Jack's view rather was that the plan was not good enough for his brother, than that his brother was not good enough for it.

"You were always good enough for anything, if that is what you mean," he said. "But I do understand, Cherry, about wanting an object; only—only it's such an odd one."

"I tell you," said Cherry, brightly, for the disclosure was a great relief to him, "that that's the very point. I don't think I get on amiss with any one, even with the *Sevillanos*, but down at the bottom of my heart, Jack, I'm not far removed—we none of us are—from "There's a stranger, 'eave 'alf a brick at him," and when I think of any direct dealing with people, anything like clerical work, why, except to my own kith

and kin, I should have nothing to say. The self-denial of missionaries seems to me incredible. I could not do as Bob means to do, I think, if health and strength were to be the reward of it. It's a very unworthy weakness, I know, but I can't help it."

"You would get on very well anywhere," said Jack; "that is all nonsense. I don't believe Elderthwaite would agree with you, and you could overwork yourself just as well there as anywhere else."

"Well, as to the place agreeing with me, that remains to be proved. It's a very small church, and a small place; and I hope I might be able to do the little they are fit for—at present. But I know it may prove to be out of the question."

Jack was silent. He could not bear to vex Cherry by opposing a scheme which seemed to offer him some pleasure in the midst of his annoyances, and if his brother had proposed to take orders with more ordinary expectations, it would have been quite in accordance with the Oakby code of what was fitting. But there was something

in the consecration of what Cheriton evidently viewed as a probably short life and failing powers to an object so unselfish, and yet, as it seemed to Jack, so commonplace, it was so like Cherry, and yet showed such a conquest of himself—there was such humility in the acknowledgment that he was only just fit for the sort of imperfect work that offered itself, and yet such a complete sense that no one else could manage that particular bit of work so well—it was, as Jack said, "so odd," that it thrilled him through and through, and he was glad that Alvar's entrance saved him from a reply.

CHAPTER XLIII.

REVENGE.

"'Now, look you,' said my brother, 'you may talk,
Till, weary with the talk, I answer nay.'"

ALVAR, having avoided his brothers after dinner, came back into the hall, and, sitting down by the fire, lighted a cigarette. As he sat there in the great chair by himself, the flames flickering on the oak panels, and the subdued light of the lamp failing to penetrate the dark corners of the old hall, his face took an expression of melancholy, and there was an air of loneliness about his solitary figure —a loneliness which was not merely external. He was perplexed and unhappy, and the fact that his unhappiness had roused in his breast pride and jealousy and anger, did not make it less real. He had not come to the point

of owning himself in the wrong, and yet he felt puzzled. He could not see how he had offended. It was a critical moment. Gentle and affectionate as Cheriton was, and happy as the relations had hitherto been between them, Alvar felt himself judged and condemned by his brother's higher standard, now that he had at last become aware of its existence. He had never been distressed by Virginia's way of looking at things, she was a woman, and her views could not affect his; and for a long time, as has been said, he had regarded Cheriton's ideas of duty as as much an idiosyncrasy as his fair complexion, or his affection for Rolla and Buffer. Now he perceived that Cheriton himself did not so regard them, but with whatever excuses and limitations, expected them to be binding on Alvar himself; and Alvar's whole nature kicked against the criticism. Cheriton had been clear-sighted enough to perceive this, and so judged it better to draw back; but Alvar, through clouds and darkness, had seen a glimpse of the light. He *knew* that Cheriton was right, and the knowledge irri-

tated him. In a fitful, dark sort of way he tried to assert his independence and yet justify himself to Cheriton. It was doubtful whether he would gradually follow the light thus held out to him, or decidedly turn away from it, and just now his wounded pride prompted him to the latter course. He would go his own way; and when he had settled his affairs to his mind, his brothers should own that he was right. And yet—did he not owe a debt, never to be forgotten, to the kind hand that had welcomed him, the bright face that had smiled on him, long ago, on that dreary Christmas Eve? Alvar did *not* say to himself, as he perhaps might have done with truth, that he had repaid Cheriton's early kindness to him tenfold; but he thought of the joyous, active youth, whose animal spirits, constant activity, and frequent laughter had been such a new experience to him.

As Alvar thought how great the change had been, his softer feelings revived, and with them the instinct of caring for his brother's comfort in a thousand trifling ways.

He remembered that Cheriton had hardly eaten any dinner, and rose, intending to go to him and persuade him to have some of the chocolate for which he had never lost the liking gained in Spain. As he moved towards the library the butler came into the hall, and, with some excitement, told him that Fletcher, his farm bailiff, wanted to speak to him.

"But it is too late," said Alvar. "He may come to-morrow."

"Indeed, sir, I think it is of consequence. Some ill-disposed persons, sir, have set one of your ricks on fire, as I understand," said the butler, with the air of elevation with which the news of any misdemeanour is usually communicated.

"Tell him, then, to come in," said Alvar, coolly; and Fletcher appearing, deposed that a certain valuable hay-rick, in a field about a mile from the house, on a small farm called Holywell, which had always been managed, together with the home farm, by Mr. Lester himself, had been discovered by one of the men going home from work to be on fire. In

early and shoot with Lord Milford. Cheriton had forgotten all about this, and, anxious not to irritate Alvar, said nothing about the magistrates' meeting during the short time they were together.

CHAPTER XLIV.

A NEW LIFE.

"His peaceful being slowly passes by
To some more perfect peace."

THE next morning Cheriton slept late, and awoke to the consciousness that he had caught a slight cold, "which," as he said to himself, "might happen to any one."

"Will you ask Mr. Lester to come to me before he goes to Hazelby?" he said, not feeling quite able to satisfy himself that Alvar had all the needful evidence clear in his head.

"Mr. Lester is not going to Hazelby, sir," said the man; "he went to Lord Milford's early this morning in the dog-cart. He left word that he would not disturb you, sir."

The engagement at Milford flashed across Cheriton's mind, and with dismay and indignation he perceived that Alvar had not thought it worth while to break it on Chris Fleming's account. In a moment he recognized the utter ruin that would fall on all chance of Alvar's success with his tenants, still more the disgrace that he would bring on himself in the eyes of the whole bench of magistrates, by the neglect of such an obvious duty, while on his own part he felt that it was such an unkindness as he hardly knew how to forgive. His first impulse was to let the matter alone, and to leave Alvar to bear the brunt of his own misdoings. But then the thought came of the distress to the Flemings, of the fatal injury to the boy from the weeks of undeserved detention, and, after all, the discredit would fall on them all alike. He forgot all his intention of nursing his cold, forgot its very existence, as he perceived, on looking at his watch, that he had barely time to reach Hazelby for the meeting.

"It is all the same," he said, "my going

to Hazelby will answer every purpose. Tell them to bring Molly round at once. As Mr. Lester has the dog-cart, I will ride."

"There is a very cold wind, and it looks like rain, sir."

"That can't be helped," said Cheriton, "there is no time to lose."

He tried to make his expedition seem a matter of course; but every one in the house believed that he went because the squire had gone off on his own pleasure, or out of what the old cook did not hesitate to call "nasty spite," had refused to justify little Fleming. Indeed, as Cheriton rode hurriedly away, he could hardly divest himself of the same opinion.

In the meanwhile, Alvar no sooner found himself well on the way to Milford than he began to feel pangs of compunction. The cold wind and drizzling rain beat in his face, as the conviction was borne in upon him, that Cheriton would certainly go to Hazelby in his place. He had not been at Milford since the day of the great rejoicing, when Cheriton, with all his fresh honours, had met them there, had wooed, and, as he thought, won

Ruth Scyton; when he himself was Virginia's acknowledged lover. He called her to mind, as she had walked by his side in smiling content, as she played with the children—felt *now*, as he never had then, the wistfulness of her eyes when they met his, and almost for the first time he recognized that the want of devotion had been on his side. He had not loved her enough. A sense of discouragement and despondence seized on him, a deep melancholy softened the resentment which he had been cherishing. As he looked back on the years of his father's neglect, on Virginia's dismissal, on his brother's views of what his position required, for once the sense of his shortcomings overpowered his sense of the many excuses for them. His indifference to the chance of Cheriton's running a great risk touched him with a self-reproach for which his theories of life offered no palliative. He could not rest, and with a suddenness and vehemence of action most unusual with him, he turned to Lord Milford as they prepared to start on their day's sport, declared that he had

suddenly recollected an important engagement, and must beg them to excuse him at once; overruled all objections on the score of his horse wanting rest by declaring that he would only drive to the station, and go by train to Hazelby.

"I am humiliated by my want of courtesy to your lordship, but it is necessary that I should go," he said; but what with the delay of starting, and the absence of a train at the last moment, the magistrates' meeting was over long before he reached Hazelby, every one had dispersed, and the court-house was shut.

He could not bring himself to ask any questions; but ordered a conveyance and started on his way back to Oakby, hardly knowing whether to reveal his change of purpose or not. On the road he passed the three Fleming brothers, trudging home through the mud. They looked away, and omitted to touch their hats to him. Alvar said to himself that he did not care; but the sense of unpopularity can never be other than bitter. He thought to himself that

after all English gentlemen did not always live on their estates. There were hundreds of his father's rank who did not hold his father's view of their duties. He could shut Oakby up, let it, go where he would never see it again. But where? Never as the disinherited heir would he set foot in Seville, and he had no craving to hunt tigers in India, or buffaloes on the prairies. He did not wish to go yachting; did not care to travel; he hated the fogs and the colourlessness of London. He was as little ready to cut himself loose from all his moorings as Cheriton himself. Suddenly, as he drove on, he saw one of the Oakby grooms riding fast towards him. The man pulled up as he passed.

"Mr. Cheriton is ill, sir; Mrs. Lester is there, and she sent me for the doctor."

Alvar felt as if he had been shot.

"Ride on," he said, breathlessly; then seized the driver of the trap by the shoulder —"Drive fast; I will give you five pounds if you will drive fast. My brother is ill; he will want me."

"Ay, sir—all right, sir," said the lad, lashing up his horse.

Alvar felt as if a telegraph would have been slow; but he folded his arms, and sat like a statue till they reached the door, when he sprang out, and at the foot of the stairs saw Jack.

"Alvar! you here!" he exclaimed.

"What is it?—where is he?—what has happened?—tell me!" cried Alvar.

"Cherry went to Hazelby, of course, to clear Chris, as you were out of the way. He was so done up when he came back, and seems so evidently in for just such a bad attack as he had before, that granny, who came back here with me, sent for Mr. Adamson. Yes, he is in bed; he was wet through."

Jack's face was like thunder; but Alvar dashed past him upstairs, and opened the door of his brother's room.

Cheriton was sitting up in bed. He had recovered a little from the exhaustion of his hasty ride, and though suffering much pain and oppression, was spending some of the

little breath he had left, in trying to explain matters to his grandmother.

"You always were a perverse lad, or you would not be using your voice now, Cherry," she said. "When your brother comes back, I shall give him a piece of my mind."

"There he is," cried Cherry. There was a look in his eyes for a moment as if he hardly knew how they were to meet; but as Alvar advanced into the room, all his vehemence subsided. He came up to the bed, and laid his hand on Cheriton's with the old tender touch.

"You are ill, *mi caro.* I think you must not talk so much just now."

Cheriton looked up in his face, and read in it, steady as was the voice, an altogether new terror and trouble.

"*This* is my own fault," he said. "I was in such a hurry—that—I would not wait for the carriage. After all, there would have been time."

"Oh, my brother—my brother!" cried Alvar, losing his self-control, "your fault!

Grandmother, it is I who have let him kill himself."

"You are just crazy," said Mrs. Lester, agitated and angry, as Alvar rushed up to her, and threw himself on his knees beside her chair, clasping her hands in his. "I don't care whose fault it is. No doubt you are one as bad as the other. For the last half hour I have been trying to make Cherry hold his tongue, and now you make a worse turmoil than ever. Since my poor son went there is no one to look to."

Mrs. Lester was shaken and terrified by the shock of sudden alarm, and agitated by Alvar's extraordinary behaviour, and thus her still fresh grief came back on her, and she burst into tears.

"Oh, granny, don't — don't!" cried Cherry, and the distress of his tone recalled Alvar to his senses.

"Oh, I am a fool!" he said, and getting up, he applied himself to soothe his grandmother with all the tact of which he was master, and was so successful, that in a few minutes she went away in search of some

remedy for Cheriton, who, as he was left alone with his brother, felt, spite of his increasing suffering, the old sense of repose in Alvar's care creep over him.

"As violent an attack as the last, and much less strength to meet it," was the doctor's verdict, and the great common terror hushed for the time all disputes and differences.

Mrs. Lester remained at Oakby, Nettie had returned to London a few days previously, and both she and Bob held themselves ready for a sudden summons.

Mrs. Lester questioned Alvar on that first evening about all that had passed, in a dry, caustic fashion, while he answered, meekly enough. "Why, ye'll have made yourself a laughing-stock to the whole place," was her only comment on the story of the horse-whipping.

Alvar coloured to his temples, but said nothing; the reproach of Jack's silent misery was much harder to bear. He who knew how all the last weeks had been troubled by Alvar's fault, could not forgive, and felt that

if Cheriton died, he could never bear the sight of Alvar again.

Alvar himself was shaken and disturbed as he had never been before. He had lost all the calm hopefulness and power of living in the present, that had made him such a support in Cheriton's previous illness; and though he was still a devoted and efficient nurse to him, there were times when he was quite unable to control his distress. He was frightened, and expected the worst; and poor Jack had to try to encourage him, a process that much softened his indignation.

All this was fully apparent to Cheriton. There was no longer the daze and confusion of that first attack of illness, the boyish astonishment at the fact of being ill at all, the novelty of all the surroundings, now, alas! so familiar; no longer, too, the sense that the exceeding sweetness of life made death incredible; no longer the same instinctive dependence on those around. Since then Cheriton had travelled a long way on the road of life, had looked across the dark river, and grown familiar with the thought

of its other shore; he was no longer frightened at his own suffering, or at its probable result, and, as his senses were generally clear, except sometimes at night, or when under the influence of the remedies, he was able to think for others—a habit in which he had gained considerable skill.

He made Alvar write to Mr. Stanforth, and beg that Gipsy might write to Jack, knowing that the surprise and joy of such a letter, and the relief of pouring out his heart in the answer, must lighten the heavy weight of the poor boy's anxiety; and so, in truth, it did, though Jack could never trust himself to thank Cherry for his kind thought. He also made the vicar go to Edward Fleming, and tell him that Alvar had only been a few minutes too late in coming to give evidence, and to entreat him to lay aside any ill-feeling for the misunderstanding "which," he said, "was partly caused by my bad management." He thought much about the state of affairs at Elderthwaite, or rather, perhaps, recalled at intervals much previous thinking. He was not equal to anything like a con-

nected conversation, and he knew that no one would let the poor vehement old parson come near him; but he greatly astonished his grandmother by telling her that he had an especial desire to see Virginia Seyton.

"I cannot talk enough to tell you why," he said; "but, granny, do get her to come."

Mrs. Lester promised; for how could she refuse him? He gave a good many directions to Mr. Ellesmere, and in especial desired that a certain cup, won many years ago at some county athletic sports in a contest with his cousin Rupert, should be given to him as a remembrance.

From only one thing Cheriton's whole heart shrank, and that was from forcing Jack to listen to parting words. He had several things to say to him, but he put them off; he could not bear the sight of Jack's grief, and in this case could not trust his own self-command. It was the one parting that he could not yet face.

With Alvar it was different. In one way, he had with him much less sense of self-

restraint, and in another, things lay between them that must be cleared away.

This state of things lasted for several days, and all the while the hard struggle between the remedies and the disease went on, a hand-to-hand fight indeed, and Cheriton's strength ebbed away, till he knew that he dared wait no longer for what he wanted to say.

It had been raining, but the yellow, level light of an October evening was shining through the thinly-clothed boughs of the great elms, and lighting up the russet and amber of the woodlands; while the purple hills beyond were still heavy with clouds—clouds receding more and more as the clear blue spread over the sky.

As Cheriton listened to the noise of the rooks, and looked out at the sunset, he recalled the awe and strange curiosity, the clinging to the dear home, to the dearer love which had made life so dear; the attempted submission, the dim trust that death, if it came, must be well for him, with which he had first said to himself that he must die; remembered, too, other hours,

when, in weakness of body and anguish of soul, he had found it still harder to believe that it must be well for him that he should live. The passionate joy, the passionate sorrow, had passed away, or rather, had been offered at last as a willing sacrifice, and the loving kindly spirit had found sweetness in life without the first, while much anxiety, much trying disappointment, had succeeded to the second. Now there came over him a wonderful peace, as he summoned his strength for what he had in his mind to say.

With a look and sign he called Alvar over to him; and Jack, who was sitting apart in the window, watched and listened.

"Alvar," he said, taking hold of his hand, "I see it clearly." And the intent, wide-open eyes, seemed to Jack as if they could indeed look beyond the mists of life. "We were wrong to wish you like ourselves. Forgive me. You — yourself — can be as good for Oakby as—I—yes—as my father. But there is only one way for us both—to love God with all our hearts, and our

neighbour as ourself. To take pains about it for His sake. That is the truth, Alvar—the truth as I know it!"

"Ah!" cried Alvar, "but I do not love my neighbours! that *is* the difference. But I love you, oh! my brother—my brother! Is it religion that will make me what you wish? I will be religious; I will no longer be careless; but oh, *caro—caro mio!* if I lose you, I have no heart to change. I have grieved you. Oh! what punishment is there for me? I would do penance like Manoel. What can I do?"

Alvar flung himself on his knees, the tears started in his eyes and choked his voice. At last he was stirred to the depths, and instincts deeper than teaching or training came to the surface.

"You know Who bore our sins for us," said Cheriton, "because He loved us."

How much, or how little, Alvar knew, after his formal teaching, and careless, unmoved youth, would be hard to say; probably Cheriton could not conceive how little; but face, voice, and manner had moved Alvar's

soul to a great conviction, however little he realized what Cheriton had meant to say.

He called on that name which his brothers had never heard from his lips before, save in some careless foreign oath.

"I swear," he said—"I swear that I will be a religious man, and that I will be a good squire to Oakby. I make it a vow if my brother recovers—"

"Oh, hush—hush!" interposed Cheriton. "If not—we shall meet again—and you *must* be good to Oakby. Let me know you will!".

"I will! I will!" cried Alvar, completely carried away. He would have thrown his arms round Cheriton, but Jack interposed—

"Alvar! Alvar! this is enough. He *must* not have this agitation. Alvar yielded, but, too much overcome to control himself, rushed out of the room.

As he hurried blindly down the stairs he met Mr. Ellesmere, and with a sudden impulse caught hold of his hand.

"Mr. Ellesmere, you are a priest. I have sworn to him that I will change, that I

will be religious. I give myself up to you. I will do whatever you wish. I swear to obey you—"

"Gently, gently!" said the astonished vicar. "You are too much agitated to know what you say. Come with me into the study; tell me what has passed. Believe me that I desire to help you in this great sorrow."

Alvar followed him, and as Mr. Ellesmere talked and listened to him, he began to hope that, in spite of an ignorance which he had hitherto had neither the conscientious desire nor the intellectual curiosity to diminish, in spite of blind impulses rashly followed, the will for good that must bring a blessing had at last been awakened, even in this strange longing for vow and penance, an instinct that seemed inherited without the faith from which it had sprung. Alvar was in the mood which might have made his Spanish ancestors vow all their worldly goods away and think to buy a blessing, and to listen to him without unduly checking his vehemence, and yet to lead his thoughts upward, was a hard task;

since Alvar was left subdued and quieted, and yet with an inkling of what had been really wrong with him, it may be inferred that Mr. Ellesmere succeeded better than he had hoped to do.

Meanwhile, to poor Jack, every word of Cheriton's had thrilled with a thousand meanings. He knew that silence was imperative, and did not mean to say another word; but Cherry felt his hand tremble as he gave him some water, and looked up at him with a smile.

"You will have Gipsy soon," he whispered, "my own dear boy."

Jack pressed his hand. "To take pains for His sake." With his whole heart Jack recognized this key-note. Nothing else would do. Even Gipsy could not by herself give his life the full joy of a sufficient purpose; but as he thought of all the currents through which he must steer, and knew too well which way they often set, he shuddered.

"If I had not you to talk everything out with!" he said, inadequately enough.

"Oh, Jack, if I can't help you still, it

will be because the work is done better. I don't fancy now that everything hangs on me. I am content."

And Jack felt that the memory of that perfect contentment could never pass away from him.

CHAPTER XLV.

MY LADY AND MY QUEEN.

"Let all be well—be well."

"So, Queenie, you see there will soon be an end of it all!"

The speaker was Miss Seyton. She stood looking down at her niece with an odd quiver in lip and voice, even while her tone was not altogether a sad one. Virginia sat in dismayed silence; she had been arranging a bunch of autumn leaves and berries to brighten up the dark old drawing-room, which bore many a trace of her presence in bits of needlework and tokens of pleasant occupation, though the house was duller and quieter than ever now that Mr. Seyton's rapidly failing health gave

him the habits of an invalid, and that both the boys were absent. Miss Seyton looked more faded than ever, but she was kind and friendly with Virginia, even though she could not divest her voice of its sarcastic tone as she continued,—

"You are a person of consequence, and you ought to understand the state of the case."

"That Roland means to sell Elderthwaite?" said Virginia, slowly.

"Yes. We can't afford, Virginia, to make pretences to each other, and we know that it will come before many months. Then what are we to do?"

However much it went against Virginia to discuss the results of her father's death, she felt that there was some truth in her aunt's words, that they ought to be prepared for so great a change; and she had also learnt to practise great directness in dealing with Miss Seyton.

"I have sometimes supposed that you would live at the vicarage, Aunt Julia," she said.

"Not if I have a penny to live on elsewhere," replied Miss Seyton. "James and I were never friends, and I'll not see the place in the hands of strangers. Besides, I've had a thirty years' imprisonment, and I'd like my freedom. Look here—when I was a girl I was just like the others; I loved pleasure as well as they did, and had it too. I was as daring as ever a Seyton of them all. However, I meant to marry and live in the south, and I was quite good enough, my dear, for the man I was engaged to. Then he quarrelled with James, and that began the breach. I didn't marry, as you may see, and when *my* father died my portion couldn't be paid off without a sale, and things were in such a mess I had no power to claim it. So here I stayed, and, let me tell you, I've stopped up a good many holes, and been quite as great a blessing to my family as they deserved."

Virginia laughed in spite of herself, though her answer was grave.

"Yes, I know that, now."

"But *now*, d'ye see, Virginia, I'm tired of it. I'm only fifty, and it'll go hard if I don't get some pickings out of the sale of the estate. Do you know, we have some old cousins living in Bath, a Ruth and Virginia of another generation? I'm inclined to think I should like to go into society—to 'come out,' in fact, in a smart cap, and to live within reach of a circulating library and scandal. That's my view, and that's what I mean to aim at when the time comes. What do you say?"

"I should like the boys to have a home somehow," said Virginia. "Perhaps that would make some place into home for me."

"I don't wish to desert you," said Miss Seyton, "but candidly I think we should be happier apart. We shouldn't amuse each other if we lived together. But won't James want to keep you?"

"I don't know," said Virginia. "I am afraid it would not be a good plan for the boys to go there for holidays—if this place is to be given up. But oh, Aunt Julia,

how *can* we tell what will happen? I can't make plans; I don't feel as if it mattered; and Roland seems to want to cast us all off."

"Yes; he's a selfish fellow. But, my dear, just consider how much worse it would be, if we had to *take him on*. Thank your stars that he means to stay in India. And as for the place, with its paint and its fences and its broken glass, let it go. We're better free of it. He is right there. The worst part of the story is poor old James who must stay."

"He can't forgive Roland."

"No—you see, Queenie, it's wits that tell. —James hasn't brains, and he has never thought of cutting himself loose. He couldn't live away from Elderthwaite, any more than he could live without his skin. But when he hasn't the family dignity to keep him up, I'm afraid he'll go down."

"He is so wretched now about Cheriton Lester."

"Yes. He is the only Lester worth

fretting for. As for that prig Jack, I'd like to see him make a fool of himself. I'd like to see him 'exceed his allowance considerably.' There's a pretty way of putting it for you!"

With which parting shot Miss Seyton went away, and Virginia sat sorrowful and perplexed, and with something of the family bitterness in her heart. Life was very hard to her. Her love for each one of her relations was a triumph over difficulties, and the sweet spontaneous passion that had promised to make her happy had been in its turn triumphed over by the uncongeniality of her lover. The softness of early youth and of her previous training had been replaced by something of the strength that expects little and makes the best of a bad business, but at a risk, the risk of the sense that evil is inevitable. Virginia was always outwardly gentle; but she had been thrown back on herself till she had gained a self-reliance that the Seyton blood in her was ready to exaggerate into scorn. For even Ruth was slow in

answering her letters, and never wrote as in her girlish days.

As she sat musing a note was brought to her. It was from Mrs. Lester, containing Cheriton's imperative request that she would come and see him. Would she come at once?

Virginia's cheeks flamed as if the missive had been from Alvar himself. She got up and put the note in her pocket, dressed herself, and leaving word with one of the servants that she meant to take a walk, set forth without delay for Oakby, walking through the plantations, across the fell, and through the fir-wood, as she had scarcely ever done alone before. She remembered going as Alvar's betrothed to ask for Cheriton during his first illness, and Alvar's absorption and indifference to her presence. Now that would be natural enough. Still she could scarcely think of Cheriton in her dread and wonder as to who might greet her, as she rang at the bell, and asked for Mrs. Lester, who came forward into the hall to receive her.

"My dear," she said, "I do not know what Cherry wants with you; but we can't refuse him. Will you come at once?"

Virginia was afraid to ask questions, she followed the old lady's slow progress up the dusky staircase, and into Cheriton's room.

The daylight was now fast fading, but its last rays fell on Cheriton's wide-opened eyes and flushed face.

He took hold of her hand, and said with extreme difficulty,—

"Thank you—my love to the parson. Ask Jack what I meant to do—and then tell him. Tell him—I say—he must reform Elderthwaite for my sake. He must do it himself. I know he can. Don't let him *be* one of the abuses. Don't get into despair." He paused for breath, and then with an accent and smile that through all the suffering had something of his old playful daring, 'I *mustn't* say anything else to you, but that will come right too."

"I will tell him," faltered Virginia, awed, bewildered, and yet with a strange sense of encouragement; she let herself be drawn

away, heard Mrs. Lester say that it was too dark for her to go home alone, she should send Jack with her to get a breath of air, while Cherry was suffering less. He was so fully himself it was hard to believe in the danger, but the attacks of coughing were most exhausting, and he could hardly take anything, she was very hopeless, and "my grandson"—this always meant Alvar—thought badly of him. "Come in here, my dear, and I will fetch Jack."

As Mrs Lester put her into the library, and left her there alone in the dusk, the tears that she had hitherto restrained broke forth.

She thought that she was crying for Cheriton, but all her own sad future, all her yearnings for the lost past, mingled together, and she wept the more because, she knew not how, Cheriton had given her a sort of indefinite comfort.

She did not hear the study door open, nor see Alvar come through the room, nor did he see her in the dim light, till he heard her sobbing.

"Who is it?" he exclaimed, becoming aware of a woman's figure near the fire. She started up, and with her first movement he knew her. "*Mi dona!*" he cried in his astonishment.

"Cherry asked to see me," she faltered. "He is so ill—I could not help crying."

"Ah, no!" said Alvar; and *I* may not comfort you!"

But he came close and stood by her side, and she saw that he too was greatly agitated. She wanted to speak about Cheriton, but she could not command her voice, nor think of a word to say.

Suddenly Alvar turned and clasped her hand.

"Ah!" he cried, with such vehemence as she had never seen in him before. "My heart is breaking! Can you never forgive? I love you; I have always loved you. When you sent me from you, it was my pride that let me submit! In my own country I knew that for your sake I was English—English altogether. I am not worthy, but I repent. I have confessed.

Help me, and I will be a good Englishman! For I have now no other country, and I cannot live without you. Give me your hand once more!"

Alvar poured forth this torrent with such burning eagerness, such abandonment of entreaty, that he did not see how weak were the defences he was attacking.

"Indeed," she whispered, "it was not *that*—not that I thought you were—not good—I thought you did not love me—much."

"I did—I do love you—I love you as my life! But you?"

"I have always loved you. I could not change," she said, with something of her old gentle dignity. "But—I have been very unhappy all this time."

"Ah, now you shall be happy! Yet, what do I say? How can *I* make any one happy! I who have grieved and vexed my brother with my unkindness—nay, caused his illness even—I cannot make you happy!" said Alvar, in a tone of real self-blame.

"I think you can!" said Virginia softly; but the words had hardly passed her lips when she started away from him, as Jack came into the room.

"Granny says I am to walk home with you, Virginia. What, Alvar, are you here? they have been looking for you. Do go to Cherry—he is so restless now!"

"I will go," said Alvar. "Take care of her, Jack, for I must not come. Farewell, *mi regna!*" He took both her hands and kissed them, then put her towards Jack, and hurried away; while poor Virginia glanced in much confusion at her escort; but he was too much absorbed in grief and anxiety to take in what had passed, or to heed it if he did. He walked on by her side without speaking; till she, trying to collect her thoughts, and actuated by a very unnecessary fear of what he would think of her silence, bethought herself to ask him what Cheriton wished her to tell her uncle.

"He said I was to ask you?"

"He wanted to take orders, and be

curate of Elderthwaite," said Jack. "You know London did not suit him, and the work was too hard, and life at home was so worrying for him. Besides, he hated being idle. He thought that he could manage to get things right at Elderthwaite, and he said that he should like it, and be happy there."

Jack spoke in a dull, heavy voice, his use of the past tense marking how completely he regarded the possibilities of which he spoke as at an end; and something in the tone showing that the proposal had been distasteful to him.

"Would Cherry have given himself for *that?*" exclaimed Virginia.

"Yes," said Jack. "I didn't like it. It seemed a great sacrifice, and besides—he was not half strong enough."

"But did he care so much? I don't mean that I can't understand his wishing to take orders—but just for *Elderthwaite!*"

"He is very fond of Elderthwaite. And he said that it was only because he fancied that he could be more useful there than

any one else; and because he has money, that he was justified in proposing it—because he was ill, I mean."

"Indeed, he could do good there! He always did!"

"You know," said Jack, rather more freely, "that Cherry has a notion that when a person seems specially marked out for any situation, he is likely, in the long run, to be the best person for it. He says you can't destroy evil without good. That people *fit* their own places, and so he believes that Elderthwaite would do better, in the long run, if Parson Seyton could be encouraged to make things a little more ship-shape, than it would with a new man, if he were driven away. You see he gets fond of people. *I* don't see it; I think it's fanciful. All reformers begin with a clean sweep. Then Cherry said valuables were sometimes found in the dust; nobody would reform if you ran at them with a besom. Of course *he* could persuade people; at any rate, he always thought he could."

"He thinks the sun is more powerful than the north wind," said Virginia. "I am sure Uncle James would have given in to him."

"So he said. But he was mistaken in one case, and then he blamed himself, and I suppose—I suppose—he has conquered at last! Any way, Virginia, you were to tell your uncle what he wished to do."

"I will tell him. He is breaking his heart about Cherry now."

"I suppose so. I can't come in. Good-bye; we'll send over in the morning."

Jack turned away. Cheriton's kindly theories might seem fanciful to him; but he would never have the chance of knocking them on the head any more. He was so miserable that even the thought of Gipsy only made him feel her absence, and wonder if so bright a creature could continue to care for him, when he had grown into a stern, hard-hearted person, without any power of softening. Poor Jack's hard heart was very heavy, and beat so fast as he came up to the house, that he could hardly ask if there was any change.

CHAPTER XLVI.

MY DEAR!

"But still be a woman to you."

EARLY the next morning Virginia received a letter from Alvar, written at intervals during his night watch in Cheriton's room. Perhaps it was the first real communication she had ever received from him, and in it he made a sort of confession of his shortcomings, as far as he himself understood them. He told her that he had been "revengeful" towards his father, and that in the affair of the Flemings he had allowed "the passion of jealousy" to overcome him. He recounted his promise to Cheriton, and with the simplicity that was at once so strange and so engaging a part of his character, assured her "that he was

no longer indifferent to religion," but would follow the instructions of Mr. Ellesmere. "I think," he added, "that this will give you pleasure."

There was a great deal about Cheriton, Alvar declaring that he could not *now* despair of anything, but that he should have written to *her* at such a time, and about *himself*, was enough to mark the change in his former relations with Virginia.

The change in himself she was ready to take for granted. All must be right where there was such humility and power of repentance; and perhaps she did him more justice than even Cheriton could have done. For Alvar had undergone no change of intellectual conviction, that element was wanting, both in his former carelessness, and in his present acceptance of a new obligation, and in the excitement of feeling under which he was acting love and remorse towards his brother had the largest share. But he had recognized himself as erring, and intended to amend, and such a resolution must bring a blessing.

But as his brothers would only have altered any settled line of conduct, after infinite heart-searchings and perplexities, they could not have conceived how simple the matter appeared to Alvar, when he had once made up his mind that he could possibly have been in fault.

Virginia had said nothing the night before of her changed prospects; she knew that the Lesters could have no thought to spare for her; but when her aunt suggested sending over to inquire, she could not pretend ignorance, and her blush and few words of explanation were enough for Miss Seyton.

"Ah, well," she said, "you might have saved yourselves a great deal of trouble if you had found this out a little sooner."

"We cannot speak of it just now, auntie."

"No; but you say, don't you, that everything happens for good? Now this good has come out of Cherry's illness; perhaps he'll get well."

After these characteristic congratula-

tions Virginia took her way to the vicarage. She found her uncle in his "study," a room which was sufficiently well lined with ancient and orthodox divinity to merit the name, though the highly respectable volumes, descended from some unwontedly learned Seyton vicar, did not often see the light.

The parson was looking out of the window down the road.

"Ah, how d'ye do, my dear?" he said, in unwontedly quiet accents. "I was just looking out, for I sent over to Oakby to inquire how that poor lad is to-day."

"We have heard," said Virginia. "I don't think he is any worse. And, uncle, I saw him yesterday; he sent for me to give me a message for you."

"A message! Well, my lassie, what did he say?"

Virginia came and stood behind the chair in which her uncle had seated himself.

"He wished me to tell you that he had been making up his mind to take orders,

and that he loved Elderthwaite so much that he meant to ask you if you would let him come and be your curate, that you and he together might set things right here. But he said that now that will never be. And he sent his love, and I was to ask you to reform Elderthwaite for his sake. He said, 'Tell him I know he can, better than any one, if he will.'"

Virginia paused, as her voice faltered.

"Why, bless my soul," cried the parson, "what does the lad mean? Why, I'm one of the old abuses myself."

"Yes—yes—uncle. But that is what he said. You must not be one of the abuses. He said you might do it all, if you would, because you love the place more than any one can."

There was a silence. The parson sat still.

"He is a good lad—he always was a good lad," he said, after a pause. "And did he think to come here, to spend his time over a parcel of scamps and drunkards? Eh! I shouldn't have be-

lieved it. He had heard that they want me to have a curate, I suppose," he added, quickly.

"Oh, yes, uncle; but he was afraid that you would not like it."

"Look here, my lassie, I like the old methody in his proper place; but I'll have no psalm-singers in my church. I'm a sound Churchman, and I don't approve of it."

Virginia, finding an objection to psalm-singing in church rather difficult to reply to, was silent, and her uncle went on rapidly,—

"I hate the whole tribe of your *earnest*, hard-working, 'self-devoted' young fellows —find it pay, and bring them into the society of gentlemen—write letters in trumpery newspapers, and despise their elders. Newspapers have nothing to do with religion. The Prayer-book's the Prayer-book, and a paper's a paper. Give me *Bell's Life*. Bless you, my dear, do you think I keep my eyes shut?"

"You are not just, uncle," said Virginia.

"But Cheriton would not have been like that."

Mr. Seyton's twinkling eyes softened, and the angry resistance to a higher standard, that mingled with the half-shrewd, half-scornful malice of his words, subsided, as he said, in quite a different tone,—

"I would have had Cheriton for my curate, my dear."

He said no more, and Virginia could not press him; and when he spoke it was only to question her about Cheriton's condition.

But when she went away he took his hat and walked out through his bit of garden towards the church, and sitting down on the low stone wall, looked over the churchyard, where a fine growth of nettles half smothered the broken gravestones; and as he sat there he thought of his past life, of his dissipated, godless youth, of the sense of desperation with which, to pay his debts, he had "gone into the Church," of the horrible evils he had never tried to check, and yet of the certain kindliness he had entertained towards his own people. How

he had defied censure and resisted example till his fellow-clergy looked askance at him, and though he might affect to despise them, he did not like their contempt. He thought of the family crash that was coming, and he was keen enough to know how he would be regarded by new comers—"as an old abuse." And he thought of Cheriton's faith in him, and the project inspired as much by love for him as by the zeal for reform. He thought of the first time he had read the service, the sense of incongruity, of shame-facedness; how a sort of accustomedness had grown upon him till he had felt himself a parson after a sort, and how, on a low level, he had in a way adapted his life to the requirements of his profession.

Then he thought of the way Cheriton had proposed such a step to himself, and, without entering into any of those higher feelings which might have repelled rather than attracted him, he contrasted with his his own the unselfishness of the motive that prompted Cheriton.

He made no resolutions, drew no conclusions, but unconsciously he was looking at life from a new standpoint.

Virginia did not see Alvar, nor hear directly from him all that day; and but for the letter in her possession, her interview with him would have seemed like a dream.

The next morning was sunny and still. She stood on the steps at the garden door, looking over the lawn, now glistening with thick autumn dew. The sky was clear and blue, the wild overgrown shrubberies that shut out the landscape were tinted with brown and gold, an "autumn blackbird" sang low and sweet. All was so peaceful that it seemed as if ill news could not break in upon it; yet, as the old church clock chimed the hour, and through the still air that of Oakby sounded in the distance, Virginia started lest it should be the beginning of the knell. As the sound of the clock died away, the gate in the shrubbery clicked, a quick step sounded, and Alvar came up the path.

Virginia could wait no longer; she ran to meet him, gathering hope from his face as she approached.

"Yes, he is better. There is hope now; but all yesterday he grew weaker every moment. I thought he would die."

Alvar's voice trembled, and he spoke with more abandonment than was usual with him; he looked very pale, and had evidently gone through much. He added details of their suspense, and of Cherry's condition, "as if," Virginia thought, "he *wanted* to talk to me."

"You are very tired," she said. "Come in and have some breakfast. Auntie and I always have it here."

She took him into the drawing-room, where there was a little table near the fire, and made him sit down, while she waited on him, and poured out the tea. She did not feel a bit afraid of him now, and, spite of his punctilious gallantry, he submitted to her attentions without any of the forms and ceremonies with which he had previously made a distance between them.

"You have been up all night. I think you ought to have gone to bed, instead of coming here," she said, sure of a contradiction.

"It is a great deal better than going to sleep to see you, my dear!" said Alvar, quaintly; and Virginia thought she liked the homely English better than the magnificent Spanish in which he had been wont to term her his lady and his queen.

"I am getting very hungry, Virginia," said Miss Seyton, opening the door. "May I come in to breakfast?"

"Oh, but that is shocking!" cried Alvar, springing up and advancing to meet her. "Miss Seyton, I have brought good news of my brother. But I must go home now, he may want me. Perhaps if he is still better I can come again by-and-by."

"Only think," said Virginia, as she went with him through the garden on her way to the vicarage to tell the good news to her uncle, "only think, when the clock struck just before you came, I was afraid it was the beginning of the knell!"

"Ah, I trust we shall not hear that terrible sound now!" said Alvar, gravely.

And yet before that day closed the old bell of Elderthwaite church was tolling, startling every one with the sudden conviction that that morning's hope had proved delusory. It frightened Mr. Ellesmere as he came home from a distant part of his parish, though a moment's reflection showed him that his own church tower was silent. What could be the matter elsewhere?

There was a rush of people to the lodge gates at Oakby, to be met there by eager questions as to what was the matter at Elderthwaite?

"It must be old Mr. Seyton, took off on a sudden," they said. "Well, so long as Mr. Cherry was getting better—"

But before curiosity could take any one down the lane to verify this opinion, up came the parson's man from Elderthwaite with a letter for Mr. Lester, and the news that a telegram had been received two hours before at the hall, to say that Mr. Roland had been killed out tiger-hunting in India.

There was more consternation than grief. Roland had not felt nor inspired affection in his own family; in the neighbourhood his character was regarded with disapproval, and his sarcastic tongue remembered with dislike. He had intensified all the worst characteristics of the family.

Virginia had scarcely ever seen him; his father and uncle had so resented his determination to sell the estate, though it had perhaps been the wisest resolve he had ever come to, that he had been to them as an enemy.

But still the chief sense in all their minds was that the definite, if distasteful, prospect, to which they had been beginning to look forward, had melted away, and that all the future was chaos.

Dick, suddenly became a person of importance, and now within a month or two of coming of age, was sent for from London. He had improved in looks and manner, and seemed duly impressed with the gravity of the situation. He was told what Roland's intentions had been, and

that his father's life could not be prolonged for many months; listened to Mr. Seyton's faltering and confused explanations of the state of affairs, and to his uncle's more vigorous, but not much more lucid, denunciation of it. Dick said not a word in reply, he asked a few questions, and at last went down into the drawing-room where his sister was sitting alone. He walked over to the window and stood looking out of it.

"Virginia," he said, "*I* don't wish to sell Elderthwaite."

"Do you think it can be helped, Dick?" she said, eagerly.

"I don't know. *I'm* not in debt like Roland—that is, anything to speak of. I don't want to wipe the family out of the county for good and all. Why couldn't the place be let for a term of years?"

"But—it is so much out of repair!"

"Yes," said Dick, shrewdly, "but it's an awfully gentlemanly-looking place yet. Fellows who have made a fortune in trade want to get their position settled before

they *buy* an estate, or to make a little more money first. I heard Mr. Stanforth talking about some old place in the south where there were fine pictures, which had been let in that way. Well then, of course, some sacrifices must be made; something was done with the money Cheriton Lester paid for Uplands. Then there's all that part out Ashrigg way—Cuddiwell, you know, and High Ashrigg. Those two farms have always paid rent. If they were sold—they're handy either for the Lesters or the Hubbards—we might put things to rights a little in that way."

"I am *glad* you care about Elderthwaite, Dick," said Virginia, impetuously.

"Oh, as to that," returned Dick, "I don't know that I go in for any sentiment about it. Of course, I couldn't live here for years to come. I'm not quite such a fool as I was once, Virginia, thanks to you and some others I could name; and I should go on as I am for the present. But it makes a difference in a man's position to have a place like this in the

background, even if it is tumbling to pieces. A girl with money might think twice whether she wouldn't be Mrs. Seyton of Elderthwaite."

"Oh, Dick! don't marry a girl for her money," said Virginia, half laughing; but she could never have imagined herself listening with so much respect to Dick's sentiments.

In truth, want of sense and insight had never been the cause of the Seytons' errors; but just as in some men a warm heart and tender conscience fail to make head against violent passion, so that they feel their sins while they commit them, so in the Seytons a shrewd *mental* sense of their own folly had always co-existed with the headstrong self-will which had overridden it. Dick had a less passionate nature, and was, moreover, less at the mercy of circumstances than if he had been brought up as the heir, and his friends in London were sensible people.

"Perhaps," said his sister, "you might ask Alvar what he thinks of it."

"Alvar? Oh, ho! is that come to pass again? So, you've made it up. Well, it is a good thing that you have some one to take care of you," said Dick, sententiously.

Alvar was taken into counsel, and the results of much discussion and consideration may be briefly told.

Dick's plans were hailed by his father and uncle as an escape from a prospect which had made death doubly bitter to the one, and the rest of life distasteful to the other. And an unexpected purchaser of the two farms was found in Judge Cheriton, who had been talking for some time of buying a small property which might be a home for him when his public career was over, and a holiday retreat for the present. There was a farm-house at High Ashrigg which might be improved into a modern antique of the style at present admired. The two farms were therefore purchased at once of Mr. Seyton himself, and with his full consent and approval.

The rest of Dick's plan could not be

carried out in his father's lifetime, but it was agreed to by Mr. Seyton as the best thing his heir could do.

All this time Cheriton was mending slowly, but with much uncertainty as to how far his recovery would be complete. He very soon detected the turn that Alvar's affairs had taken, much to his satisfaction; but Jack, guessing that the news of Roland's death would be a shock to him, it was not till he had begun to insist that his own state must not again delay Alvar's marriage, that he heard the story of which it might have been said "that nothing in Roland Seyton's life became him like the leaving of it;" for it proved that he had met his death by an act of considerable bravery, which had saved the lives of others of the party. Perhaps Cheriton, unable to be untender to the memory of his boyish ideal, gave him a truer regret than any of his own family.

He listened with great interest to all the future arrangements, and was the first to suggest that his old acquaintance,

Mr. Wilson's son, was to be married to a young lady of fortune, and might form a possible future tenant for Elderthwaite.

As for the rest, even setting her deep mourning aside, Virginia would not hear of marrying while her father grew daily weaker; nor was Cheriton at all equal to the inevitable excitement and difficulty of arranging plans for the winter which must have ensued.

It ended, as soon as he was able to bear the journey, in his going to Torquay with Alvar, to stay for the present. Mrs. Lester went back to Ashrigg, and Oakby was once more left solitary.

CHAPTER XLVII.

THE YEOMANRY MEETING.

"All's right with the world."

It was a bright morning just before Whitsuntide in the ensuing year, when the bluebells were still adorning the Elderthwaite plantations, and the ivy on the church was fresh with young green shoots. Once more Parson Seyton sat on the churchyard wall watching his nettles, which now, however, were falling beneath the scythe, while a space had previously been carefully cleared and trimmed round a handsome cross-marked stone of grey granite, which showed the spot where Mr. Seyton had rested, now for nearly three months. Suddenly a step came up the lane and through the gate, and the parson sprang up joyfully as Cheriton Lester came towards him.

"Well, my boy—well? So here you are, back at last. And how are you?"

"Oh, I am very well—quite well now," said Cheriton.

And indeed, though the figure was still very slight, the hand he held eagerly out still over-white and thin, the colour too bright and variable for perfect health and strength, he looked full of life and spirits, overjoyed, as he said, to find himself at home again.

"Oh, yes, Alvar is here, of course, and we started together; but we met Virginia in the lane, and then—I thought I would come and find you. How lovely it all looks!"

"Ah, more to your taste than Mentone?"

Cherry laughed. "My taste was always a prejudiced one," he said; "but Mr. Stanforth and I were very jolly at Mentone, especially when Jack joined us. How did Alvar get on up here by himself at Christmas?"

"He got on very well *here*—if by here you mean Elderthwaite. As for Oakby,

he attended all the dinners and suppers and meetings and institutions like a hero. But I suspect he and his tenants still look on one another from a respectful distance."

"Ah, they won't be able to resist him next week, he'll look so picturesque in his yeomanry uniform. We shall have a grand meeting."

"The volunteers keep the ground, I understand?" said the parson.

"Yes, myself included. There doesn't seem to be much for them to do, and they wished me to come very much. Then, you know, we have had a grand explanation about Jack's affairs, and granny and Nettie have got Gipsy with them; so Sir John found out that the pictures wanted Mr. Stanforth, and he is coming down. Then Jack couldn't resist, and managed to get a couple of days' leave. So the only thing to wish for is fine weather. But I am not forgetting," continued Cherry, in a different tone, "that *here* you have all had a good deal of trouble."

"Well," said the parson, "it was a great

break up and turn out; and I'm bound to own your brother was a great help in getting through it. Julia, she is gone off to Bath, and writes as if she liked it; and I was very glad that Virginia should stay here with me for the present. Mr. Wilson has taken the place for his son, and it is being put in order. But all in the old style, you know, Cherry," said the parson, with a wink, "no vulgar modernisms."

"Fred Wilson's a very nice fellow," said Cherry.

He had sat down on the wall by the parson, and now, after a pause, began abruptly,—

"I saw Dr. A—— again as we came through London. He says that I am much better; indeed, there is nothing absolutely the matter with me. I haven't got disease of the lungs, though of course there is a tendency to it, and I shall always be liable to bad attacks of cold. He says I should be better for some definite occupation, partly out of doors. He does not think London would suit me, but this sort of

bracing air might do better than a softer one, as I was born here, except perhaps for a month or two in the winter. I *may* get much stronger, he thinks, or— But it was a very good account to get, wasn't it?"

"Yes, my lad, I'm glad to hear it—as far as it goes," said the parson, looking intently at him. Cheriton looked away with deepening colour, and said, rather formally,—

"I thought that I ought to tell you all this, sir, because I have never yet felt justified in referring to what I asked Virginia to tell you last year. But my wishes remain the same, and if you think with such doubtful health I could be of any service to you or to the place—I—I should like to try it."

"Why, if you have your health, you might do better than be my curate," said the parson.

"But I won't exemplify a certain proverb! In short," said Cherry, looking up and speaking in a more natural

manner, "if you'll have me, parson, I'll come."

"And suppose I say I won't have you?"

"Then I should have to ask the bishop to find me another curacy," said Cheriton. "I have quite made up my mind; even if I could follow the career I once looked forward to, which is impossible, I should not wish it. I've had some trouble, only *one* thing has made it bearable. I should like to help others to find that out. But I want to help my old neighbours most. I made up my mind with this place chiefly in my thoughts. I care for it, for many reasons. But nothing now would induce me to change my intention of taking orders if I have the health to carry it out."

An odd sort of struggle was evident in the old parson's weather-beaten face.

"They'd work him to death in some fine church at a watering-place, with music and sermons, and all sorts of services," he muttered to himself.

"Yes; I don't think that that would suit me as well as Elderthwaite."

"Then, my lad," said the parson, with some dignity, "I will have you. And, Cherry, I—I *understand* you. I know that you have stood by me, ever since you dusted out the old church for the bishop."

"That's just what I want to do now!" said Cherry. "Thank you; you have made me very happy. There are Alvar and Queenie," and with a hearty squeeze of the hand he started up and went to meet them. The parson remained behind, and as Cheriton moved away from him he lifted his rusty old felt hat for a moment, and said emphatically,—

"I'm an old sinner!"

The morning of the Yeomanry Review dawned fair and bright, and brought crowds together to the wide stretch of moorland above Ashrigg, where the review was to take place. Whitsuntide was a time to make holiday, and half Oakby and Elderthwaite was there to see. The only drawback was that Virginia's mourning was still too deep to admit of her sharing in so large a county gathering, for which she

cared the less, as Alvar, in his blue and silver, mounted on the best horse in the Oakby stables, and looking as splendid as a knight of romance, rode round by the vicarage to show himself to her.

But Parson Seyton was present in a new black coat and a very conspicuous white tie, mounted, he assured Cheriton, to do credit to his future curate.

Cheriton himself appeared in the grey and green to which he had once been enthusiastically devoted, and which was now worn for the last time before he began his preparation for the autumn ordination. In the meantime he could stay at Oakby, while Uplands was being made habitable, and could begin to feel his way among the Elderthwaite people, while Virginia was still there to help him, for she and Alvar meant to be married quietly in the summer.

But the happiest of all happy creatures on that bright morning, was perhaps Gipsy Stanforth, as she sat with Nettie and Sir John and Lady Hubbard, while Jack was on horseback near at hand. The two young

ladies excited much interest, for it was Miss Lester's first appearance on leaving school, and people had begun to say that she was a great beauty, as she sat perfectly dressed and perfectly behaved, her handsome face with its pure colouring and fine outline as impassive "as if," thought Dick Seyton, "she had never seen a hay-loft in her life."

Gipsy, on the other hand, could not help sparkling and beaming at every pleasant sight and sound. This was Jack's world, and it was such a splendid one, and every one was so kind to her; for Nettie, though she secretly thought Gipsy rather too clever, knew how to behave to her brother's betrothed. Gipsy could not keep her tongue still in her happy exultation, and very amusing were her remarks and comments, till, if people came up to the carriage to look at Miss Lester, they frequently remained to talk to Miss Stanforth.

Her father was in another carriage with the rest of the Hubbard party, enjoying the brilliant scene perhaps more than any one present, since no quaint incident, and no

picturesque combination escaped his keen and kindly notice.

"Nettie looks like coming out sheep-farming in Australia in that swell get-up, doesn't she?" said Bob to Jack, as they had drawn off to a little distance together.

"She doesn't look like it," said Jack; "but if she set her mind to that or to anything else, she would do it."

"Oh," said Bob, it's all nonsense. I sha'n't marry out there. I shouldn't like a colonial girl; but I shall come home in a few years' time, and look about me. Nettie will be married before then, I hope, in a proper way. I hope you'll all be very careful about her acquaintances."

"Well, we'll try," said Jack, smiling. "She will have Virginia to go about with."

"Yes, I like Virginia. She'll do Alvar good," said Bob, condescendingly. "And I like Gipsy too, Jack; she's very jolly."

"Thank you;" said Jack, "she is."

"I suppose you'll be a master in a school somewhere when I get back, and Cherry

will be a parson. Well, he'll make a very good one."

"Yes," said Jack, shortly. He did not like discussions as to Cherry's future; it hung, in his eyes, by too slender a thread.

"Good heavens!" cried Bob, suddenly, "look there!"

Sir John Hubbard had left his carriage, and his young horses, which had been already excited by the numbers and the noise; frightened by some sudden chance movement among the crowd, no one could tell what—the bark of a dog, the sudden crossing of an old woman with a tray of ginger-beer—shyed so violently that the coachman, who was holding the reins loosely, was thrown off the box, the horses dashed forward down the hillside, towards an abrupt descent and break in the ground, at the bottom of which ran a little stony brook.

Jack and Bob were far behind, and even as they spurred forward they felt it would be all in vain; while Nettie, springing on to the front seat, tried to climb up and reach the reins; but they swung far beyond her

reach. She looked on and saw all the danger, saw the rough descent ahead, heard the cries of horror on all sides, saw too, one of the yeomanry officers gallop at headlong speed towards them, dash in between them and the bank, and seize the reins. A violent jolt and jerk, as the horses were thrown back on their haunches, and she recognized Alvar, as he was flung off his own horse and down the bank by the shock and the struggle, as other hands forced the carriage back from its deadly peril, and Jack, dashing up, his face white as marble, dismounted and caught the trembling Gipsy in his arms.

Nettie heeded none of them; she sprang out and down the bank, and in a moment was kneeling by Alvar's side, who lay senseless. She had lifted his head and unfastened his collar, before her brothers were beside her.

"No, no; I'll do it," she cried, pushing Jack's hand aside.

"Hush, Nettie, nonsense; let us lift him up. Get some water."

There were a few moments of exceeding terror, how few they never could believe, as they carried Alvar to smooth ground, and tried to revive him, before he opened his eyes, looked round, and after a minute or two, said faintly,—

"What has happened? Ah—I remember," trying to sit up. "Are they safe?"

"Yes—yes—but you? Oh, Alvar, are you killed?" cried Nettie.

"No, no," said Alvar, "my arm is hurt a little. I think it is sprained—it is nothing. Do not let Cherry be frightened."

"I never thought of him!" said Jack. "Oh, he won't know anything of it—he is not here. You are sure your arm is not broken?"

"No. Ah, there he is! Help me up, Jack! Cherry, it is nothing."

Cheriton, who had been considerately summoned with the news of a dreadful accident, but they hoped Mr. Lester was not killed, was speechless with mingled terror and relief. He knelt down by

Alvar's side, and took his hand, hardly caring to ask a question as to how the accident had come about; but now Sir John Hubbard's voice broke in,—

"I never saw such a splendid thing in my life, never—the greatest gallantry and presence of mind! A moment later and they would have been over! My dear fellow, I owe you more than I can say—Lady Hubbard, and your own sister, and Jack's pretty little Gipsy—my horses starting off in that way. I can never thank you—never. I couldn't have believed it. And I thought it was all over with you!"

"I am not seriously hurt, sir," said Alvar, sitting up, "and there was nothing else to be done; it is not worth your thanks."

"Is not it?" cried Mr. Stanforth, unable to restrain himself. "More thanks than can be spoken."

"I'll accept them all for him," said Cheriton, looking up, his face full of triumph; while Nettie, hitherto steady, broke down, to her own disgust, into sobs.

"I'm not frightened—no!" she said, as Gipsy tried to soothe her. "But I thought he wasn't worth anything—and *he is!*"

"Come," said Sir John, "we must not have any more heroics, and the hero must go home and rest—to Ashrigg, I mean. And you too, Cherry, go and look after him; here's your grandmother's carriage, while I see if my horses are fit to be trusted with the ladies."

Alvar was still dizzy and shaken, though he said that the hurt to his arm was a trifle, and now stood up and inquired after his horse, which had been caught by a bystander, and was unhurt. Sir John's coachman had also escaped with some severe bruises; and there was a general move. Jack, seeing Gipsy with her father, followed his brothers, anxious about them both, and overflowing with gratitude towards Alvar for his darling's safety.

But as they turned to drive away they were obliged to cross the ground, and there rose from all sides such a thundering shout as threatened a repetition of the former

danger; yeomanry, volunteers, and spectators, all joining in such an outburst of enthusiasm as had never echoed over Ashrigg Moors before. Their driver pulled up in the centre of the field with the obvious information,—

"They're cheering, sir; it's for you."

Alvar stood up, with his hand on Jack's shoulder, and bowed with a grace and self-possession from which his pale face and hastily extemporized sling did not detract, and which his brothers — agitated, and ashamed of their agitation, were far from rivalling, as Jack desired the driver to "get on quick," and Cheriton bent down his head, quivering in every nerve under the wonderful influence of that unanimous shout.

Some hours later, as Alvar lay on a sofa at Ashrigg, resting in preparation for the public dinner at Hazelby, for which every one had declared he *must* be well enough, the doctor included, he looked at Cherry, who sat near him, and said, with a smile,—

"Cherito *mio*, I think they would all have grieved for me—the twins and all—

if I had been killed. They would have been sorry for me—now."

"Don't—don't talk of it. Of course they would," said Cherry, with a shudder.

"Ah! I fear you will dream of it, as you used of the mountain at Ronda. It will hurt you more than it has hurt me."

"No," said Cherry; "but if we had lost you! We can hardly believe yet that we have you safe."

"But," said Alvar, with unusual persistency, "then *you* would have been the squire, after all. Ah! I am cruel to hurt you; but, Cheriton, *once* they would not have grieved."

Cheriton could not command an answer, and Alvar quitted the subject; but the unmistakable affection showed to him at last by his brothers and sister healed the old wounds as nothing else would have done.

No one would own that the fright and agitation demanded a quiet evening, and the ladies all repaired to Hazelby, to sit in the gallery at the Town-hall to hear the

speeches, Mrs. Lester, who had happily not been present in the morning, accompanying them; and Jack, going to fetch Virginia, and after overwhelming her with the story of the alarm, assuring her that she *must* come and hear Alvar's health drunk. Sir John Hubbard intended it should be done.

And so, when the usual toasts were over, old Sir John rose, and, full of compunction for past prejudices, and of gratitude for what Alvar had done for him, said that this was really the first public occasion they had had of welcoming Mr. Lester among them; spoke of his father's merits, of the difficulty a stranger might have in accommodating himself to their north-country fashions; touched lightly and gracefully on the reason of Alvar's recent absence, and their pleasure in welcoming back again "one long known and loved," and how much was owing to the elder brother's care; hinted how Alvar had won "one of the best of their county prizes;" and then, out of the fulness of his heart, thanked him for his heroic behaviour in

saving the life of Lady Hubbard, and himself from an irreparable loss, and, moreover, a frightful sense of responsibility.

Then Alvar's health was drunk with all the honours, and it was long before the enthusiasm subsided sufficiently to allow him to reply.

He stood up, in his unusual height and dignity, and said, slowly and simply, "I thank you *much*, gentlemen. Sir John Hubbard need not thank me for rescuing my sister, and the betrothed of my brother. I was at hand, and of the danger I did not think." ("No, no; of course not," cried a voice.) "I have been a stranger, but I have no other country but England now, and it is my wish to be your friend and your neighbour, as my father was. I will endeavour to fill his place to my tenants; but I am ignorant, and have little skill. I think it is not perhaps permitted to me to name the one who will most help me in future, one of whom I am all unworthy. But there is another, who has always given me love, whom I love most dearly, as

I think you do also. My brother Cheriton has taught me how to be an English squire."

And among all those who cheered Alvar's speech, the voice that was raised the loudest was Edward Fleming's.

The next morning Cheriton went alone along the path from Oakby to Elderthwaite. His great wish was granted; his father's place would be worthily filled. Alvar would never be a nobody in the county again, would never seem again out of place as their head. All old sores were healing, all were turning out well—how much better than he could ever have hoped!

Even for hopeless Elderthwaite things looked hopeful; and Cheriton's quick and kindly thoughts turned to his share in the work of mending them. "If I may," he thought, "but if not, I think I shall never fear for any one or any place again."

Too much, perhaps, for the impetuous spirit to promise for itself; but come what

might, those who loved Cheriton Lester had little cause to fear for the real welfare of one who loved them so well and looked upward so steadily.

EPILOGUE.

"Mr. Ellesmere! I saw your name in the visitors' book. So you are taking a holiday in Switzerland?"

"Mr. Stanforth! Very glad to meet you. You will put us up to all we ought to see and admire. Are you alone?"

"Yes; you know I have lost my travelling companion. My next girl is still in the schoolroom, and I think will never be so adventurous as Gipsy."

"You have good accounts, I hope, of Mrs. Jack, as we irreverently call her."

"Excellent; she adores the boys, and the boys adore her; her letters are very educational and æsthetic. She has picked up more 'art' as a schoolmaster's wife than ever she learnt as an artist's daughter, and could, doubtless, set me right on tones and colours."

"Cherry told me that Jack had taken to the new culture."

"Yes, he was much amused at the development produced by house-furnishing. But double firsts have a right to vagaries. But tell me something of the Oakby world. It is a very long time since I have been there, and one does not see much of people at a wedding, though I thought Cheriton looking very well."

"Yes, he is fairly well, *very* useful, and, I think, quite content. Alvar has settled into his position, and fills it well. He is indignant if he is supposed to be ignorant of anything English; and his sweet graceful wife guides him as much as 'Fanny' did his father thirty years ago. His one trouble is that little Gerald is as dark as all his Spanish ancestors, and even Frances is like the Seytons, but that he can forgive."

"Does she promise to rival her aunt? What a beautiful creature Miss Lester is!"

"Splendid! and still Miss Lester, which is rather a trouble to her grandmother.

Whether she will ever be Lady Milford—or whether— Any way, Nettie can keep her own counsel."

"And now, tell me about Elderthwaite. Has Cheriton justified his experiment?"

"Yes, I think I may say that he has. He has done a great deal. No one else could have done so much good, and certainly no one would have done so little harm."

"And the old parson is resigned to improvements?"

"Yes, but there have been fewer external changes than you would expect, or than Cherry would wish if he were his own master, or even if he could depend on himself. But of course his health has weighted him heavily, and he cannot promise perfect regularity in services or arrangements."

"I wonder he can manage at all."

"Well, I think on the whole his health *has* improved, and he is well enough off to contrive things—has a horse and waggonette for bad weather; and his house

is near the church, and he has built on a great room to it, and fitted it up with books and games, and he makes a sort of club of it for the boys and young men. His sitting-room opens into it, and he has classes and talks, and gets them to come and see him one by one. If he cannot do one thing he does another. And they have evening services in the summer, and early ones when it is possible. I think the sort of resolute way in which Cheriton has recognized the need of special care of himself, if he is to be useful, and carries it out, is one of the most remarkable things about him. Many young men might have killed themselves with hard work, and many would forget the danger when well and in good spirits, but he has recognized the limitations set to him, and bows to them."

"Yes, and he does not offend his vicar."

"Rarely, he has never failed to recognize his right to respect—never allowed the Wilsons, who are ardent and enthusiastic, to force anything on him. And there's a

great change. I don't mean that the old fellow is cut after any modern pattern yet; but he is considerably more decorous, and sometimes there's a sort of humility about him in admitting his shortcomings that is very touching. Cherry is the very light of his eyes."

"And how does Cherry hit it off with the modern element?"

"Well, there I think his position has been a great advantage to him; they are a little afraid of him. But he gets on admirably with them, and you know they have improved the church immensely this last year, and what is more to the point, perhaps, it is filled with good congregations."

"Is Cheriton a fine preacher?"

"Well, his people like him. I have rarely heard him; he is very difficult to get. Yes, I like his sermons; but he has not much voice, you see, and his manner is very quiet. He has not the sort of vehement eloquence you might have expected. I made some comment once to

him, and he looked at me, and said, 'I daren't get eager and tire myself.' I saw then how little strength he had to work with."

"Poor fellow! But this life—does it satisfy him? Is he happy in it?"

"He is just as merry and full of fun as ever. He has a wonderful capacity for taking an interest in every one and everything; and though Alvar does not depend on him in the old exclusive way, he is most tender and careful of him, and Cherry delights in the children. I *think* Jack's marriage *was* rather a wrench; those two do cling together so closely, and Jack was a great deal with him; but still there are grand plans for the holidays, and he is very fond of your daughter."

"I don't think that marriage will loosen the tie."

"No; and he is much too unselfish really to regret it. Then all his village boys bring him pets; he says everything makes a link from a horse to a hedgehog. And my curates and the Ashrigg ones run

after him, and think it a privilege to take a service for him; and he has done one rather feather-pated fellow, I know, a world of good."

"That I can believe."

"Yes; for, after all, Mr. Stanforth, it is not his being a Lester of Oakby, nor a man of means, nor his wonderful tact, nor even his great charm of manner in itself that counterbalances his weak health and frequent absences, or makes a life spent among rather uncongenial elements sufficient to him. It is that he has the root of the matter in him as very few have. What he does and says may be less in quantity, but it is infinitely above in quality the ordinary work of his profession. He looks deep and he looks high, and men feel it. He has come through much tribulation, and—well, Mr. Stanforth, the dragon slayers have their reward."

"Yes, one must touch a high note in thinking of him."

"So high, that one fears 'to mar by earthly praise,' one who I verily believe is

as true a saint, as full of love and zeal.—Well, being so, as I truly think, he has what some holy souls have lacked, the gift of a gracious manner and a most sympathetic nature; and if a few more years and a little more experience could be granted to him, I believe he will have a great spiritual influence, if not wide, deep. Any way he will leave in one place the memory of a pure and holy life, and will lead others to follow the Master he loves so well."

THE END.

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